Effect of Reality TV on Emotional Intelligence in College Students

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The Effect of Reality TV on Emotional Intelligence

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between the amount of reality TV that is watched, and emotional intelligence scores of college students. Surveys were used to determine if the relationship of EQ (emotional intelligence) scores and reality TV viewership closely follow that of a logistic growth model. It appears that once viewers reach an average of three hours of reality TV per month, they hit a ceiling as far as EQ scores. The overall scores prove to be higher for those who watch more reality TV, showing the positive effects of simulation learning theory and the positive potential the mass media can have on its audience.

The Effect of Reality TV on Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

It is shown that nearly 40% of Americans watch reality television shows (Onepoll 2019). Reality TV stars are known for the drama that goes on in their lives, and they are very popular because unlike the majority of the population, they are put on the spot to tell the world their thoughts at any given moment. Their sheer honesty is something that is not part of our everyday realistic society, and people like to see how others react to situations, and the thought process that led them there. Mander critiques the viewership of reality television and its effects, stating that "television inhibits your ability to think, but it does not lead to freedom of mind, relaxation, or renewal" (1980). He argues that we become what we watch, instead of learning from what we watch. While this hyperbolic argument made by Mander holds true, it is heavily critiqued due to the denial that the audience has the ability to learn from the media, and will not just be manipulated by it. In other words, he fails to recognize the "co-evolutionary arms race". UCLA's Professor Steen, makes the argument of simulation learning theory. He argues that people are willing to spend hours immersing themselves in fictional scenarios and it shapes them profoundly. Simulation learning, contrary to Mander's argument, is a good thing. Audiences can use the media to learn from other people's experiences without ever having to go through them, themselves. They can get inspired by characters and reap the rewards. Mander fears that simulation learning can be so impactful that audiences can actually pick up negative skills, such as the clear steps to robbing a bank from various fictional movies. However, if we can see a positive relationship that evolves from spending a lot of time watching the media, then we can be more at ease.

The Effect of Reality TV on Emotional Intelligence

In the 1950's George Gerbner postulated that the more television a person watches, they will be greatly influenced by the media on a quantitative scale. The more hours that audiences are exposed to reality television, the more they are likely to adopt that reality as their own. He specifically looks at the long term cumulative effects of the media, and an increased viewership means that more people are skewed to thinking that TV tells you the truth. With this theory, there is a large emphasis on the downside to having audiences adopt what they watch as their own reality. However, I was interested to see if it could actually result in positive effects on audiences. If audiences are exposed to more reality TV, this means that they are exposed to many more dramatic events than what they would go through during their own lives. In addition, there comes the result of the dramatic issues, along with viewing *how* the reality TV stars deal with, and resolve their issues. Could an increased viewership of reality television programs have a positive side-effect of increased emotional intelligence? My research looks at the relationship between the average quantified amount of reality television a college student watches per month (in hours), and their emotional intelligence score, sectioned off by different sub-genres of reality TV.

Emotional Intelligence, professionally and alternatively known as the "Theory of Mind" looks at the following five factors: Self Awareness, Managing Emotions, Self Motivation, Recognizing Others Emotions (Empathy), and Handling Relationships (Patino 2014). It is defined by Google as the "capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically". In other words, it is one's ability to be aware of their social surroundings and have an inclination of how to respond to pressing social engagements. Emotional intelligence is something that every person has, however

some individuals have a better grasp on the principle than others. What makes emotional intelligence a unique trait to obtain, is that it is not highly talked about. It is not something that is taught directly in schools, nor is it a topic that many people will sit down to discuss. Most people may not even be aware of the term at all. The lack of spotlight makes it almost seem as though it is a hidden characteristic in each person. All the reasons that make emotional intelligence difficult to measure, are also the reasons that make it fair to observe.

Some of the leading factors that contribute to an individual's emotional intelligence largely include the relationships that the person has had throughout their lives. This is why an adult would likely have higher emotional intelligence than a five year old, solely based on having gone through more experiences, and learned from them. Every person will have been exposed to a different familial situation growing up in addition to being raised in different environments and cultures, all of which will define one's emotional intelligence. One thing that can be held constant, however, are the works in the media. If two people from different backgrounds read or watch the same fictional stories provided by the media, they will get the same information, however they will process it with different frames. They will analyze the situations based on their past experiences. On the other hand, with reality TV, they have to watch how other people handle situations, and they learn from the results while never directly having to go through the process themselves. The medium provided by the mass media is a significant variable in measuring emotional intelligence because it gets to be constant for all viewers, no matter their differences in upbringings.

Many studies from the disciplines of communication and psychology have looked at the effects reality TV has on one's emotional intelligence, with defining positive results. Jacobs

(2013) found that reading fictional literature will make us more "tolerant of ambiguity". However, he only looked at the effect that fictional literature would have on people, as opposed to the additional frames audiences would get from watching television specifically. The ability to read fictional literature gives one freedom to make their own idea of the characters' emotions and reactions based on the descriptive words of the author. However, on the basis of the old saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words", the audience gets another layer of emotion when watching real people react. The ability to see television personalities' facial expressions, volume and vigor of words, is something that can neither be seen nor heard when reading literature. More recently, Black and Barnes (2015) looked at the effect that the specific category of drama had on a "Theory of Mind" test. They argued that a visual medium would be more effective in increasing theory of mind. They found that although their results were not statistically significant, the group of people that watched drama shows scored higher than those that had watched documentaries. Finally, a study done by Nuskool (2014) specifically looked at what we unconsciously learn from watching reality TV shows. They found that competition shows help audiences with problem solving, strategy and active participation, while dramatic TV programs will expose the audience to multi-narrative storytelling, social dexterity, and it mentions the effect it has on emotional intelligence. Most of the research was done in the realms of communication and psychology, although, there was no conclusive evidence of the direct relationship between the single variables (quantifiable hours) of reality TV, and emotional intelligence scores.

My research differs from the previous works in that I am specifically looking at how the amount of hours a student watches reality TV during the year will relate to their emotional

intelligence score. Will the students who have never watched reality TV agree with the negative critics, in that they will score higher because they will not mimic the outrageous emotions seen on TV? Or, will those who have watched the most reality TV have the highest scores, after learning from mistakes they see being made by reality TV stars? I hypothesize that people who have watched greater amounts of reality TV in their lives will have a higher emotional intelligence score because the mass media has exposed them to see various situations come to surface and the resolutions that come out of them. They will have seen how the reality TV stars dealt with issues, and have the opportunity to learn from both their mistakes and successes. To test this, I will survey currently enrolled UCLA students, many of which are my peers and my close friends. I will compare the mean amount of hours watched per month by each student and their overall emotional intelligence score. I will also look at the scores in relation to the sub-genres of reality TV that are most popular. This observational study will not have a control group, as I was not able to reach out to all the students surveyed and have them watch one hour of a reality TV show, versus a seed group of people who have watched reality TV at their own whim.

Methods

In order to collect this data, I created a Google Forms survey and distributed it to about 70 students in the hopes of getting at least 30 responses. I created a quantitative scale on how much they watch reality TV, if at all. My sample consisted of college students that are at the age where their maturity is developing, but everyone is at a different level. I would like to have students take an official emotional intelligence test, as well as answering questions regarding how much reality television they have been exposed to. Before they take an emotional

intelligence test, I had them read statements of the definition of what emotional intelligence is, and then have them rate themselves on a scale from 1 to 5. The following questions included: *"I have the capacity to be aware of, control, and express my emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically"*, and, *"I have the ability to monitor my own emotions as well as the emotions of others, to distinguish between and label different emotions correctly, and to use emotional information to guide my thinking and behavior and influence that of others".* After rating themselves, they then took the official emotional intelligence test provided by (https://www.arealme.com/eq/en/).

The full survey was conducted on the following 15 questions. First I asked if they watched any form of reality TV. Then, I broke down the sub-genres of reality TV into seven different categories: Drama, Documentary, Legal, Competition, Lifestyle, Transformation, and Social Experiment, additionally adding examples of each of these categories. I chose these seven because when researching the different types of reality TV, these were the seven that showed up the most and covered the most area to this genre. Next, I had the quantitative scaled questions. First, I asked how often they watched reality TV during the school year, and then I asked how often they watched it during their free time (summers, breaks, etc). It was important to split up these two segments because many people may not watch any television during the school year, so it would skew the data if they were asked on a more general scale. I used these two answers giving a scale from 0 times per month, to 5+ times per month, to get an average estimate of how often they watch reality TV specifically per year. After they rated themselves on their emotional intelligence, I had them take the 10 question survey provided by arealme.com which gave them their overall score out of 200 on emotional intelligence.

The reason I chose this specific emotional intelligence quiz instead of the many others online, was because this one was only 10 questions. When it comes to asking people for their time to take a survey in which they get nothing in return, they are more willing to take it if it will not cost much of their time. So, while other surveys may have been more in depth and accurate with 160 questions and above, I decided to take the trade off and use this test so I could get more responses. As long as all the surveyors are taking the same exam, the standard will remain the same in relation to the scores, so this should not be too much of an issue. I got a total of 30 responses to my survey. The respondents of my survey came from two main groups. First I sent the link out to my teammates and some of the colleagues in my other classes, as well as some of my friends who are students at other universities. All of the respondents were college students, demographically, the majority of them were females and athletes. This sample is not in any way representative of the U.S. population, or of college students in the country, however it is representative of students. There were not many complications that arose when distributing the survey in order to collect the data, however, there is always the possibility that some respondents did not take the survey seriously, or they did not thoroughly read through all of the quantitative or situational questions, leading to poor data. This randomization is a possibility with any observational study, however this will be taken into account when analyzing the outliers, if any.

Results

For the current undergraduate college students, the results of the emotional intelligence test were fairly similar across the group. On average, the respondents watched two and a half hours (2.516667) of reality TV per year. The majority of respondents (around 70%), reported to watching reality TV, while only 30% said they do not watch any form of reality TV show. Of the

70% who do, 43% of respondents watch “Drama”, 10% watch “Competition”, 6% watch “Lifestyle”, 6% also watch “Transformation”, and 3% watch “Legal”. These numbers are much higher than stated by Onepoll, which claimed only 40% of Americans watch reality TV - that is 30% fewer than the results I got. The mean emotional intelligence score for the group was 49.3%, while the median was 50%. These do appear lower than expected, however given Figure 1, it is apparent that these results are not entirely out of the ordinary, as the graph assumes the normal distribution.

When further analyzing the other variables of the data, one thing that really stood out was the comparison between the average official emotional intelligence scores vs. the self testing scores. Responses typically had people rating themselves very high when it came to the self tests, no matter their viewership frequency. It was very anomalous to find individual's who rated themselves in the 1 or 2 range of the self test portion. The average student scored 80% on their own emotional intelligence, whereas the majority of them got an actual score of 50%. This shows that regardless of whether the students watched reality TV or not, they believe that their character fits the definition of emotional intelligence by 80%. This could raise the question of accuracy of the test itself along the definitions placed by the self testing questions. Given that almost all definitions of emotional intelligence relate to the same five core principles, there is not enough evidence to state that the test the respondents took, did not align with the definition.

Next I looked at the strength that each variable has on predicting emotional intelligence. In order to do this I created models of simple and multiple linear regression and extracted the R squared scores for each of the variables. I first looked at the relationship between the EQ scores and the mean hours of viewership per month. This had an R squared of 12.7%, much lower than

expected if I want to be able to make any significant conclusions based on the two variables alone. I then looked at the strength of the data in relation to a normal distribution. This is called the Normal QQ Plot seen in Figure 2. Ideally, the dotted points would exactly or very closely follow the dashed line, signifying a strong normal relationship between the two variables. Figure 2 shows that there are some points that stray from the distribution, in addition to three outliers. Next I looked at the relationship between EQ scores predicted from mean hours and the type of reality TV watched. This gave me an R squared similar to that of the single variable, of 12.9%. This shows that alone, the sub-genre of reality TV does not make much of an impact on the emotional intelligence scores. Meaning that whether someone watches drama over legal shows, they will not be more or less affected when it comes to measuring their emotional intelligence. This tells us that every sub-genre of reality TV has the ability to teach the audience something and gives them the opportunity to learn from the contestants/ characters. Lastly, I looked at the relationship between the EQ scores, and the combined variables of mean hours, type, and the average self testing scores. These produced the highest R squared value of 22.7%. Figure 3 shows the QQ Plot for these variables and it is not dissimilar to that of Figure 2. It almost appears as though Figure 3 mirrors Figure 2, however the difference in the R squared shows that there is higher consistency given more variables.

The correlation between the two variables of EQ scores, and average hours of viewership is greater than the R squared for the distribution. There is about a 30% correlation between the two variables, nevertheless, it is also important to look at the R squared value in order to make an assumption based on them. This leads to the final graph, Figure 4, which is the most important summary of the data to this experiment. The x-axis shows the average amount of hours of reality

TV watched by college students per month, while the y-axis represents their emotional intelligence scores. The range is not too high, meaning that there was not too much of a difference between those who watched more vs. those who watched less reality TV. Figure 4 looks similar to a logistic growth graph, meaning that it increases to a certain point, and then it will level out to a "carrying capacity". This shows that there is a ceiling when it comes to the EQ scores in relation to TV viewership. Instead of a linear increase in scores, once viewers reach a certain amount of hours, which looks like it is around 3, the EQ scores will start to level off and actually decrease once viewership extends to five hours or more. The data shows that once viewership reaches a point of 3 hours per month, for a year (total of 108 hours per year), any extra time spent watching reality TV will start to wear off on the viewer and they will actually start mimicking the characters, instead of learning from them. Overall, even once viewers start watching an excess of reality TV, their scores are on average, still higher than those who do not watch any reality TV.

Discussion

Previously, I hypothesized that people who watched greater amounts of reality TV would have higher scores on the EQ test; however, there is a possibility that some viewers might take those scenarios too seriously and would actually mimic the reality television stars, and result in lower EQ scores. The data appears to support the logistic growth model when it comes to defining emotional intelligence scores based on reality TV viewership. Students may feel as though they are more aware of their emotions than they actually are. Part of this could be the ego of self reflection, or they might just feel as though they have picked up on many of their past social interactions. The data is relevant to my hypothesis because although emotional

intelligence relies on multiple variables, many of which were not tested, there was still a 30% relationship between the emotional intelligence scores and reality TV viewership. An obstacle to overcome with this experiment is that with a small sample I can not prove correlation, only at best association between my variables. One difficulty I ran into is the process that one develops their EQ does not only rely on one variable. There are many variables that shape how an individual will react and think, mainly stemming from how they were raised and how their parents taught them to deal with emotional/ stressful situations. This is one of the areas that would need more data. It would have been helpful to this study to be able to measure past experiences and familial upbrings, however, there is not really any way I can account for these other variables on the basis of the media, and my additional research does not conclude a direct reasoning for how one develops their emotional intelligence.

Based on Mander and Gerbner's theories, this hypothesis is significant because it critiques Mander's view on the negative effects of media, while also supporting Gerber's theory that extended viewership of the media will begin to alter the viewer in some aspect, whether good or bad. The downside to Gerbner's cultivation theory states that heavy TV viewers tend to adopt reality TV as their own real world. Additionally, younger viewers may depend more on TV for info than other users do. This signifies that if the study focused on Gen Z viewers, they would give different results than those seen by Millennials. Similarly, if this study was based on surveying Baby Boomers, there would be a different discussion involved. This relates to both their theoretic frameworks because with the collected data, it breaks through Mander's argument that TV is bad no matter the situation, and turns the narrative on the *amount* of TV that would be beneficial to viewers. This also fits with Gerbner, that "TV has long term effects which are

small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant….. The cumulative process by which TV fosters beliefs about social reality" (1976). Additionally, the results corroborated with previous researchers findings. For example, it appears that most students watch the genre of drama when watching reality TV. While Jacobs' study looked at the effect from reading fictional literature, our results on the basis of learning from other people's experiences and implementing resolutions to the viewers own life, still hold.

Lastly, this study works to develop on the existing idea of the zone of proximal development. This can be thought of as first, a set of core skills that an individual has mastered, such as learning sarcasm. Outside of the core skills, lies the zone of proximal development, aka, the envelope of learning. This is the area of potential subjects to be mastered and join with the core skills. This study analyzes emotional intelligence, which is in the ZPD for the majority of college students. The results state that those who have around 180 total hours of reality TV viewership, have a larger potential to become aware of, and develop their emotional intelligence. The quicker one is capable to take this ability out of their ZPD and into their core skills, the quicker they are able to grow and add more to their ZPD. This adds a higher rate and margin of growth for each individual, just by being able to observe and learn from situations simulated on a reality television show.

Conclusion

Average viewership of reality TV logistically correlates to the level of emotional intelligence of college students. The overall scores are higher for students who watched more hours per month of reality TV, than those who did not watch any, or had lower viewership. The data hit a ceiling at around three hours per month when it came to the maximum scores for

emotional intelligence. This follows Mander and Gerbner's theory that if an excess of reality TV is watched, the viewer will begin to mimic the characters, resulting in negative effects; and in our case, lower EQ scores. Overall, self construction in simulation learning, coming from the media, is intrinsically rewarding when viewers are able to distinguish learning experiences from mirroring experiences, displayed by the mass media.

In order to generalize the results, there needs to me more participants for the sample to be representative of the data. In order to create causation, there needs to be a shift from an observational study, to a controlled experiment. The results would be able to create more of an impact if there were questions included about the respondents' past experiences and familial relations. This project was not able to answer the questions regarding the overall effect the mass media has on its audiences. There still longs to be a study that is able to come to a statistically significant, and conclusive result on whether or not taking in large amounts of information through the mass media will have a positive or negative effect. If this experimental study would be conducted, it could greatly impact the world of psychology and communication, as it could give insight on the importance and the effect that mass media has on the population. It could indicate a potential "sweet spot" amount of media exposure that is found useful to the average citizen, as well as a cap on the amount of time spent watching frames of people on the TV.

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Appendix

Figure 1:

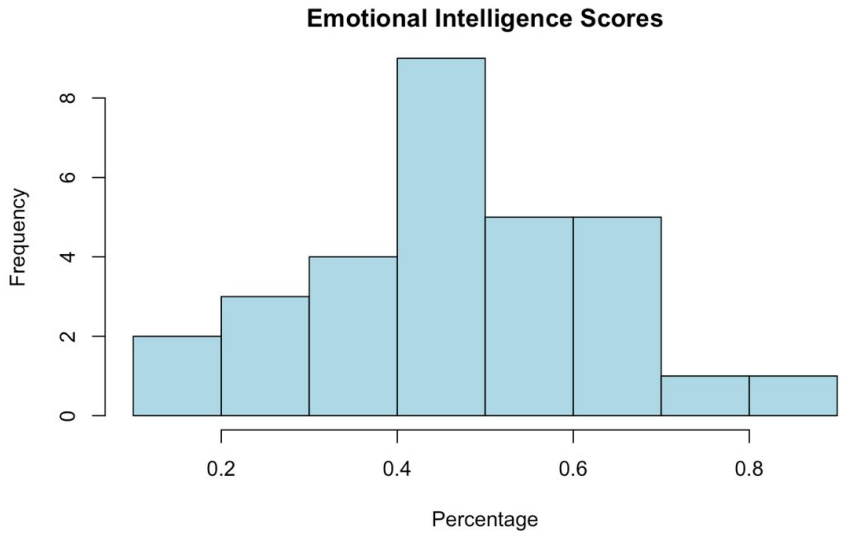


Figure 2:

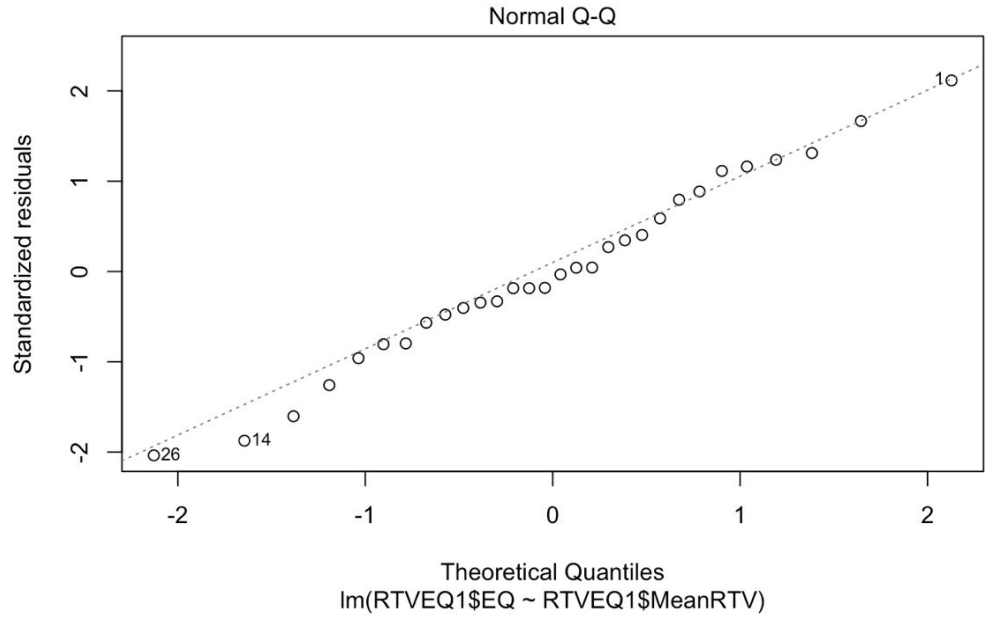


Figure 3:

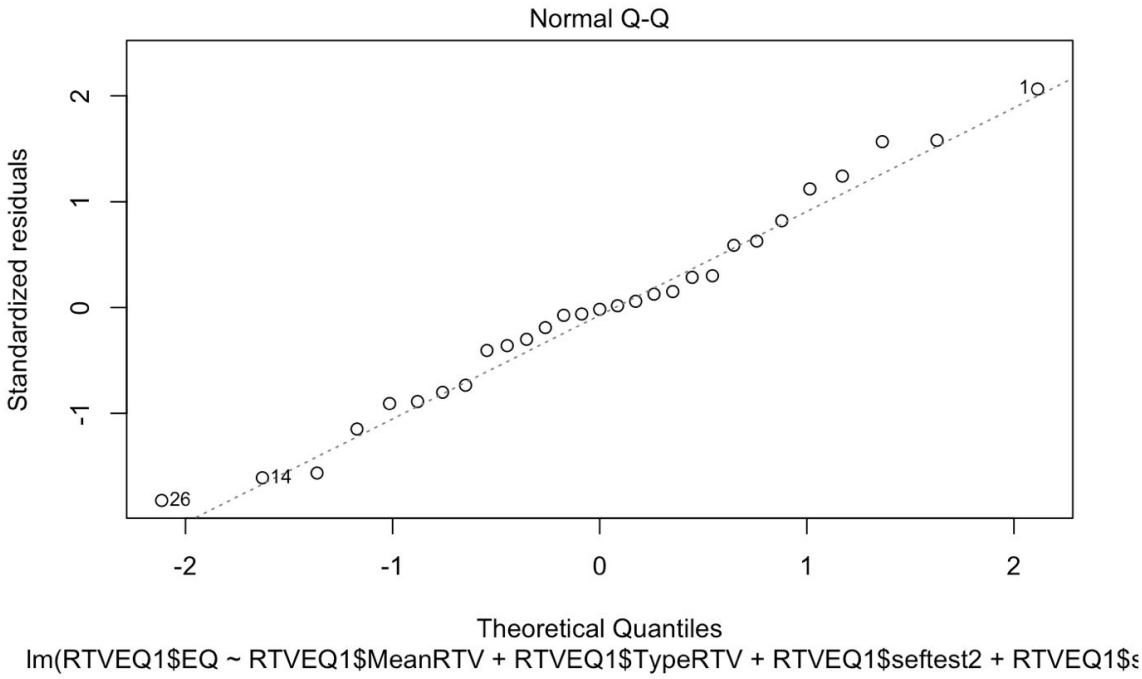
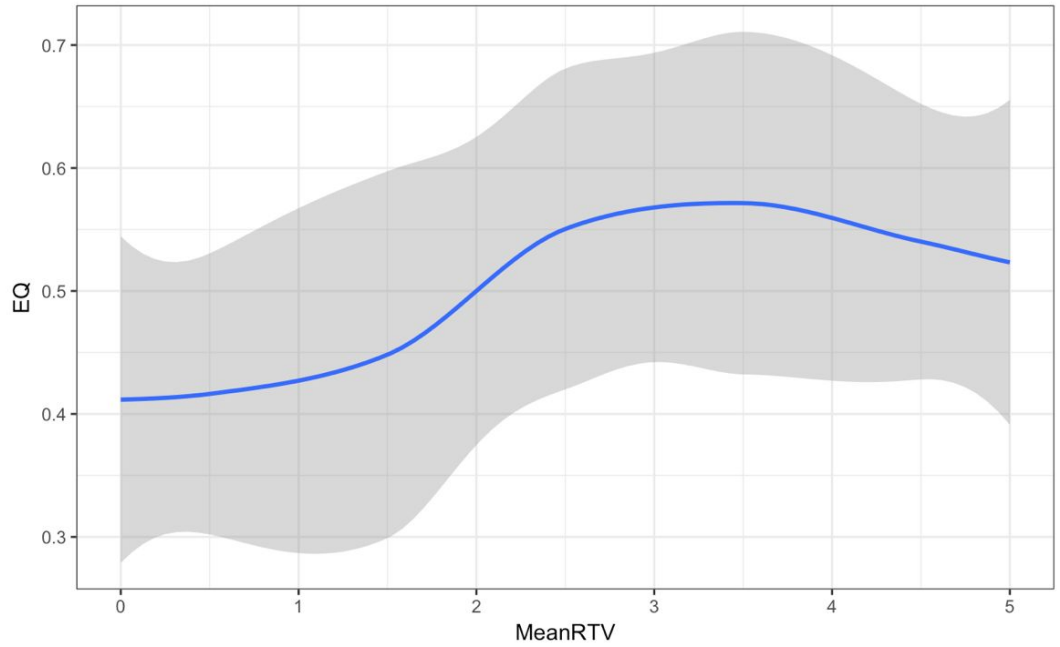
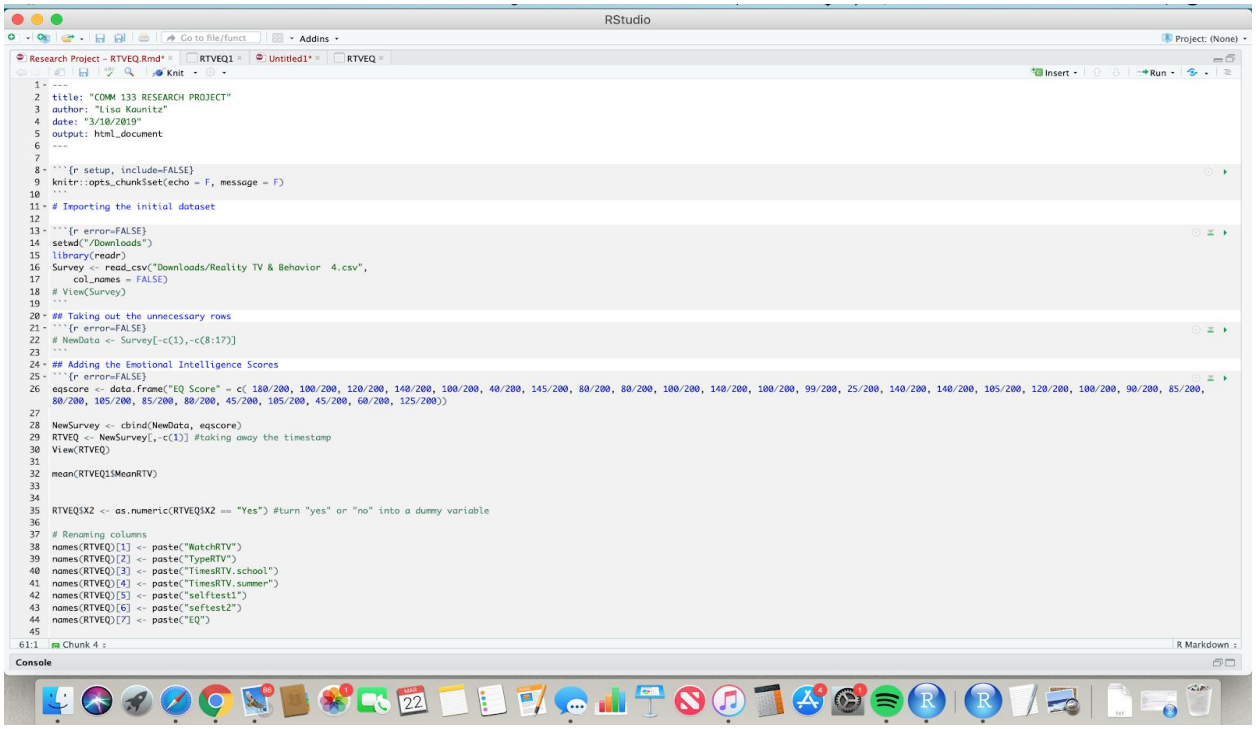


Figure 4:



R Studio Code:



```
---
title: "COMM 133 RESEARCH PROJECT"
author: "lisa Kaunitz"
date: "3/10/2019"
output: html_document
---

```{r setup, include=FALSE}
knitr::opts_chunk$set(echo = F, message = F)
```
Importing the initial dataset

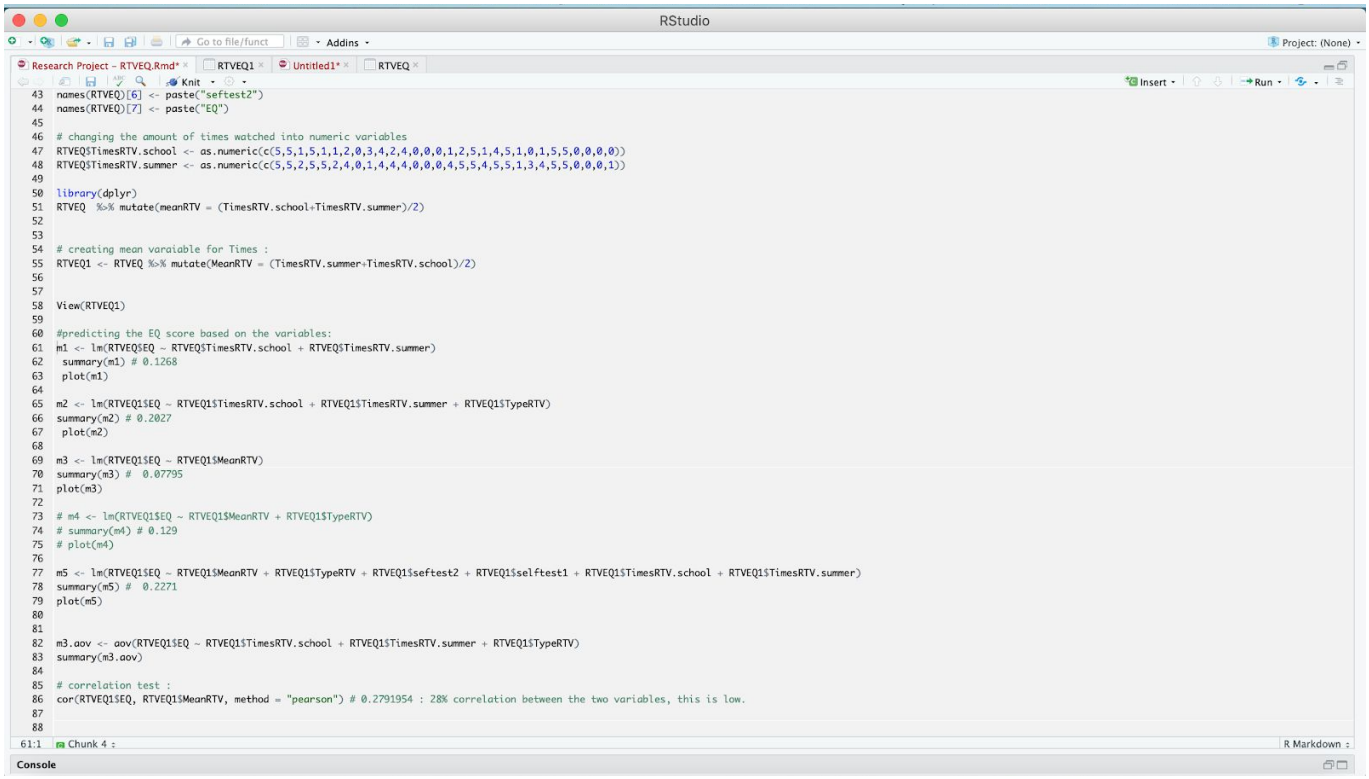
```{r error=FALSE}
setwd("/Downloads")
library(readr)
Survey <- read_csv("Downloads/Reality TV & Behavior  4.csv",
    col_names = FALSE)
# View(Survey)
```
Taking out the unnecessary rows
```{r error=FALSE}
# NewData <- Survey[-c(1),-c(8:17)]
```
Adding the Emotional Intelligence Scores
```{r error=FALSE}
eqscore <- data.frame("EQ Score" = c( 180/200, 100/200, 120/200, 140/200, 100/200, 40/200, 145/200, 80/200, 80/200, 100/200, 140/200, 100/200, 99/200, 25/200, 140/200, 140/200, 105/200, 120/200, 100/200, 90/200, 85/200,
80/200, 105/200, 85/200, 80/200, 45/200, 105/200, 45/200, 60/200, 125/200))

NewSurvey <- cbind(NewData, eqscore)
RTVEQ <- NewSurvey[,-c(1)] #taking away the timestamp
View(RTVEQ)

mean(RTVEQ1$MeanRTV)


RTVEQ1$X2 <- as.numeric(RTVEQ1$X2 == "Yes") #turn "yes" or "no" into a dummy variable

# Renaming columns
names(RTVEQ)[1] <- paste("WatchRTV")
names(RTVEQ)[2] <- paste("TypeRTV")
names(RTVEQ)[3] <- paste("TimesRTV.school")
names(RTVEQ)[4] <- paste("TimesRTV.summer")
names(RTVEQ)[5] <- paste("selftest1")
names(RTVEQ)[6] <- paste("seftest2")
names(RTVEQ)[7] <- paste("EQ")
```



```
names(RTVEQ)[6] <- paste("seftest2")
names(RTVEQ)[7] <- paste("EQ")

# changing the amount of times watched into numeric variables
RTVEQ$TimesRTV.school <- as.numeric(c(5,5,1,5,1,1,2,0,3,4,2,4,0,0,0,1,2,5,1,4,5,1,0,1,5,5,0,0,0,0))
RTVEQ$TimesRTV.summer <- as.numeric(c(5,5,2,5,5,2,4,0,1,4,4,4,0,0,0,4,5,5,4,5,5,1,3,4,5,5,0,0,0,1))

library(dplyr)
RTVEQ  %>% mutate(meanRTV = (TimesRTV.school+TimesRTV.summer)/2)


# creating mean varaiable for Times :
RTVEQ1 <- RTVEQ %>% mutate(MeanRTV = (TimesRTV.summer+TimesRTV.school)/2)


View(RTVEQ1)

#predicting the EQ score based on the variables:
m1 <- lm(RTVEQ$EQ ~ RTVEQ$TimesRTV.school + RTVEQ$TimesRTV.summer)
 summary(m1) # 0.1268
 plot(m1)

m2 <- lm(RTVEQ1$EQ ~ RTVEQ1$TimesRTV.school + RTVEQ1$TimesRTV.summer + RTVEQ1$TypeRTV)
summary(m2) # 0.2027
 plot(m2)

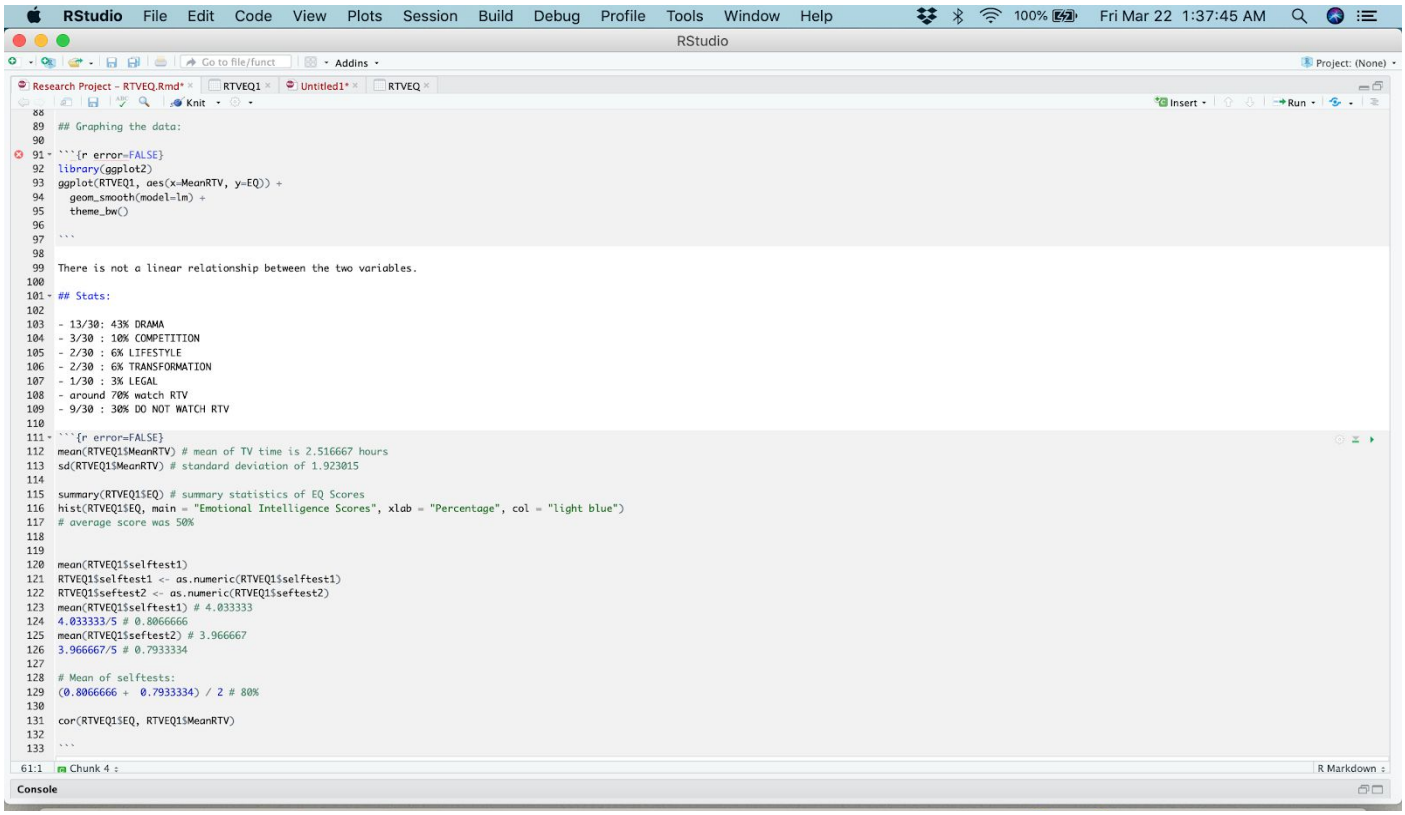
m3 <- lm(RTVEQ1$EQ ~ RTVEQ1$MeanRTV)
summary(m3) #  0.07795
plot(m3)

# m4 <- lm(RTVEQ1$EQ ~ RTVEQ1$MeanRTV + RTVEQ1$TypeRTV)
# summary(m4) # 0.129
# plot(m4)

m5 <- lm(RTVEQ1$EQ ~ RTVEQ1$MeanRTV + RTVEQ1$TypeRTV + RTVEQ1$seftest2 + RTVEQ1$selftest1 + RTVEQ1$TimesRTV.school + RTVEQ1$TimesRTV.summer)
summary(m5) #  0.2271
plot(m5)


m3.aov <- aov(RTVEQ1$EQ ~ RTVEQ1$TimesRTV.school + RTVEQ1$TimesRTV.summer + RTVEQ1$TypeRTV)
summary(m3.aov)

# correlation test :
cor(RTVEQ1$EQ, RTVEQ1$MeanRTV, method = "pearson") # 0.2791954 : 28% correlation between the two variables, this is low.
```
```


RStudio File Edit Code View Plots Session Build Debug Profile Tools Window Help
Fri Mar 22 1:37:45 AM
RStudio
Research Project – RTVEQ.Rmd*
RTVEQ1
Untitled1*
RTVEQ
Knit
Insert
Run
Graphing the data:
```{r error=FALSE}
library(ggplot2)
ggplot(RTVEQ1, aes(x=MeanRTV, y=EQ)) +
geom_smooth(model=lm) +
theme_bw()
```
There is not a linear relationship between the two variables.
Stats:
- 13/30: 43% DRAMA
- 3/30 : 10% COMPETITION
- 2/30 : 6% LIFESTYLE
- 2/30 : 6% TRANSFORMATION
- 1/30 : 3% LEGAL
- around 70% watch RTV
- 9/30 : 30% DO NOT WATCH RTV
```{r error=FALSE}
mean(RTVEQ1$MeanRTV) # mean of TV time is 2.516667 hours
sd(RTVEQ1$MeanRTV) # standard deviation of 1.923015
summary(RTVEQ1$EQ) # summary statistics of EQ Scores
hist(RTVEQ1$EQ, main = "Emotional Intelligence Scores", xlab = "Percentage", col = "light blue")
# average score was 50%
mean(RTVEQ1$selftest1)
RTVEQ1$selftest1 <- as.numeric(RTVEQ1$selftest1)
RTVEQ1$seftest2 <- as.numeric(RTVEQ1$seftest2)
mean(RTVEQ1$selftest1) # 4.033333
4.033333/5 # 0.8066666
mean(RTVEQ1$seftest2) # 3.966667
3.966667/5 # 0.7933334
# Mean of selftests:
(0.8066666 + 0.7933334) / 2 # 80%
cor(RTVEQ1$EQ, RTVEQ1$MeanRTV)
```
61:1
Chunk 4
R Markdown
Console