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Polygamy is creepy, wrong, and sick! (however, I find it fascinating) : parasocial comparison, parasocial processing, parasocial contact hypothesis, and polygamy

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POLYGAMY IS CREEPY, WRONG, AND SICK! (HOWEVER, I FIND IT FASCINATING):
PARASOCIAL COMPARISON, PARASOCIAL PROCESSING, PARASOCIAL CONTACT
HYPOTHESIS, AND POLYGAMY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by

Thomas Phillip Madison
B.A., Texas Tech University, 2002
M.A., Texas Tech University, 2008
December 2013

This work is dedicated to families -- polygamous, monogamous, multiracial, multiethnic, and the many other beautiful forms they may take. Nobody really knows what a family is *supposed* to look like, but we all know it in our hearts when we see one.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not exist if it weren't for the support from an endless stream of people who either believed in me or put up with my less desirable character traits. I've said it in my master's thesis and I'll say it again: I thank God for carving my path through the influences of the following people. No doubt some people whom are due credit will be overlooked in this section. I wish to apologize in advance, and please rest assured of this -- if I overlooked you, I will be painfully aware of it for the rest of my life.

The people who have always been there and who I hope will be there for years to come are my wife Leticia, my parents Dr. Tom and Ann Madison, my grandmother, Clydelle Madison, my aunts and uncles, Alice, Ken, Cynthia, Mike, Miriam, and Charlie. My great aunt, Joyce Jarmon, is also someone I'd like to mention, as she, well into her 90s, has taken to social media as proficiently as a teenager. As mean as I was to her when we were kids, my sister, Merriet Madison has always provided a shoulder to cry on. If the world were full of people like her, life would be both exciting and comfortable. Sadly, my grandmother Gwendolyn Scherz and grandfathers Otto Scherz and Thomas Franklin Madison Jr. are no longer here to see this thing come to an end.

As far as in-laws go, I married extremely well. They are too numerous to name, but I have at any given time 14 brothers and sisters-in-law in Mexico, as well as around 30 nieces and nephews. These people I consider as much my family as my blood relatives. I am incredibly thankful for all of my family's support over the years. It is support like this that helped me become educated and productive enough to get into the incredibly competitive doctoral program in the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University.

In February 2008 Dr. Margaret “Peggy” DeFleur called me at Texas Tech and said the Manship School at LSU wanted to fly me in show me the campus. She was the first contact I had with the University. Over the past five years Dr. DeFleur has been one of the most inspiring and comforting people employed at LSU. She has seen armies of graduates students come and go, and I have no doubt her expertise and engagement are at least in part responsible for their successes, just as she is for mine.

During my visit to the LSU campus, I later met Amy Ladley (now a Ph.d.), Amy Martin, Dr. Ralph Izzard, Dr. Monica Postelnicu, Raluca Cozma (now Ph.D.) -- all instrumental in my decision to accept the Manship School’s offer to join the doctoral program. I have remained friends over the years with Dr. Gennadi Gevorgyan, Dr. Masudul Biswas, and Dr. Chris McCollough, whom I also met during my first visit to LSU.

Dr. Amy Reynolds took the reins from Dr. DeFleur regarding graduate student advising, and has been there for me on numerous occasions. One day, future Manship graduates will write of her as I have Dr. DeFleur. The Manship School’s grad program is in good hands with Dr. Reynolds.

Chris McCollough, Ph.D., may be one of the most considerate people I have ever met. In September 2008 Hurricane Gustav devastated parts of South and central Louisiana, as well as Mississippi. In Gustav’s aftermath, the Baton Rouge streets were quite dangerous. Giant trees had ripped out power lines all over town and many parts were flooded. Power was out in some parts for weeks and the National Guard was mobilized to get food, water, and ice to the survivors. Almost five years later the city is still repairing itself. Immediately after the hurricane, however, Chris took it upon himself to drive around to the homes of us incoming doctoral students to check on our statuses. Luckily nobody was injured, though some of our homes had

been damaged. Chris organized a barbecue to get us all together, away from ruminating about our situations in humid darkness, and to put food in our freezers to good use before it went bad.

Chris also helped me in my job hunt. His wisdom and experience proved invaluable as I began my formal job search, and some of his pointers not only helped me find work as a professor, but will shape how I teach students in the immediate future. I am proud, privileged, and honored to include Chris among the people I call “colleague.”

Patricia Smith, Dr. Erica Taylor (who finished the Ph.D. program in an astounding 3 years), Dr. Ashley Kirzinger, Dr. Matthew Thornton, Jason Laenen, Emily Pfetzer, and I formed the 2008 Manship doctoral cohort. We sweat, bled, suffered, starved, stressed, panicked, and sometimes even had fun together. At this time we have all gone our separate ways, but having the shared experience of the program with these people has been an honor for me. I want them all to know that time together, in my mind, was very special, and I wish them all the best as we take our shared experience in our respective directions.

Jason Laenen and I met Richard Graymer in a digital humanities class taught by Dr. Lillian Bridwell-Bowles. I don’t think I’ve ever had a friend quite like Richard, one of the most prolific and productive artists and musicians I have ever known in my life. We are all our own worst enemies, and friends like Richard recognize this and stop us before we drive ourselves insane. Richard’s friendship and support over the years brought me back from the edge of insanity on numerous occasions, and I’d like to publicly acknowledge what an outstanding person he is. I will forever reflect fondly upon the times we spent hashing out life, trying to figure things out, and just accepting that most things we’ll never figure out – we just have to live through them.

Alex V. Cook came to LSU in August of 2012 as the Student Media Advisor for the Manship School. As did the other people mentioned in this chapter, Alex has shaped the way I think about life, particularly in such diverse concepts as creative expression, fatherhood, and journalism. There is usually a social distance between a grad student and the faculty and staff. With Alex, our relationship feels more like a kinship -- the kind good friends feel with each other but not necessarily the real and often-obnoxious kind between blood relatives. Plus, it really says something about a friend when around 70% of the time you go to lunch with them you end up laughing so hard the muscles in your neck and skull hurt. For having the privilege of knowing Alex Cook, I am very thankful.

Dr. Laura Crosswell and myself suffer from similar fears and anxieties. We defended our dissertations a couple of months apart, but the time leading up to our completion of the documents and organizing the defenses was incredibly maddening. I am quite thankful for having her as a friend and colleague and, in general, someone who understands exactly how it feels to be tightly gripped by the icy fingers of academic terror. I value her friendship and want to acknowledge that her support in my own times of dissertation stress helped get me through. I only hope that I was as helpful and comforting to her during her times of stress as she was to me.

One of the formative experiences of my doctoral career was working in CreateLab. CreateLab is an extracurricular group supported by the Digital Media Initiative to identify technological problems in mass communication and find creative tech solutions. Kristin Hinton, Rachel Weaver, Vilien Gomez, Haley Shales, Prentiss Darden, Mallory Richard, Chris Carpenter, and I were the inaugural group. Working with these people was an incredible challenge (considering my “advanced” age), but one of the more rewarding things I ever had the opportunity to do. It is my sincere hope that CreateLab continues to provide students with the

opportunity to tackle these incredibly complex and challenging problems that media companies themselves often cannot solve.

When my family was plunged into crisis in June of 2011, several friends came to my rescue. Due to a particularly difficult pregnancy, my wife, best friend, and boss Leticia Madison was hospitalized for close to a month. Though they may be acknowledged elsewhere in this chapter, I want to extend additional thanks to Dr. Masudul Biswas, Dr. Ellis Deville, Patricia Smith, Richard Graymer, and Jason Laenen. The social support offered by friends like these was invaluable and helped make a crisis manageable. I may never be able to repay the favor, but would cheerfully spend the rest of my life trying.

Daniel Winkler and Patrick Bachman have been the best neighbors I have ever had. In October 2012, my wife was in a terrible car accident. Daniel and Patrick were there for me to talk to about issues, as well as give me rides to deal with life in general. It can feel very lonely when you find out your wife has been in a car accident, she is hospitalized, and you have no means of getting to the hospital. For all their support I am incredibly grateful.

Keren and Kris Henderson, after hearing of our ordeal and transportation problem, sold us the most incredible car I have ever owned – at a great price I might add. The Suzuki Swift is still with us, nine months later, and continues to get around 35 mpg in a city gridlocked with traffic and poor layout. Moreover, Keren and Kris are supportive friends with two children of their own. I look to them as sources of parenting advice as well as friends with whom I can comfortably discuss media effects and actually enjoy our conversation. For having crossed paths with Keren and Kris, I am very thankful.

In my fifth year as a doctoral student, I found myself looking for work or other means of supporting my family and paying tuition. I will be forever grateful to the International Services

Office (ISO) at LSU, particularly Ms. Loveness Schafer. Under Loveness I learned many of the ins and outs of both the Department of Labor and the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services). A Malawi native, Ms. Loveness married a sociology professor and immigrated to the US. For immigration and labor concerns at LSU (and even beyond), Ms. Loveness is generally considered THE authority. It has been a privilege to serve as her graduate assistant and I feel the experience of working with her in this area of immigration is one of the more significant experiences of my career as a graduate student.

Two (at least) of the student workers at the ISO make life worth living for all of those around them. Raquel Badillo and Lyndsey Schexnider are valuable assets for the ISO -- they are friendly; they are charming; they make us laugh; they serve hundreds, possibly thousands of international scholars, and they have a great time doing it. I don't think I've ever worked in an office with such high morale, and these women at the front desk are largely responsible for creating an incredibly pleasant work environment for the rest of us. I truly wish them the best in their lives, and am certain they will enjoy only the best. Their enthusiasm is contagious; wherever they go -- if they only carry a small percentage of the upbeat enthusiasm with them that they show in the ISO -- the rest of the world is guaranteed to be a better place. Sadly, I can't take them with me when I move on in my academic career.

Maggie Aillet, Matt Priest, Natalie Rigby, Lorena Colima, Angela Kanney, and Janice Goodloe also deserve my thanks. In addition to Ms. Loveness and the student workers, these people form the incredible team that is the International Services Office at Louisiana State University. Working with them has not only been a learning experience, but it has been a warm and enjoyable time in my life. I cannot remember a time when I enjoyed the company of my coworkers more than I have enjoyed the company of these people. They form a community that

places the immigration issues of LSU in good hands, but more importantly, they place themselves in good hands by being a part of this particular community. For having crossed paths with these people, I am incredibly thankful.

Finally, there are possibly hundreds of other people I have become friends with over the years to whom I owe a debt of acknowledgement. Some include lifelong musician and artist friends such as Tucker Wyatt, Joseph Prestiano, Brannon Grant, Ryan and Rob Hutchison, Ciaren McClosky, Brian Purington, Jason McBride, Heather Hughes, Mark Thibodeau, Mike Cantilena, Chris Horn, Mike Jeffers, Josh Mackey, and Nick Johnston. Others include people whom I hardly ever see but think about a great deal because there is something or another about them I find incredible: Keeley Kristin, Lakshmi Tirumala, Johnny Evans, James Williams, Larry Strub, John Hawkins, Dr. Ed Younglood, Arijit Basu, Dr. Ellis Deville, Madeline X., Gabriel Zolman, Tyrone Adams, James X., Jason Skidmore, and Amanda Cortright. Some had profound influences on me in the past: Dr. Kent Wilkinson, Dr. Tom Johnson, Dr. Todd Chambers, Dr. Harsha Gangardabatla. Yet others are my friends and colleagues of the future: Dr. and Mrs. Gary Mayer, Dr. John Allen Hendricks, Dr. Linda Bond, Dr. Casey Hart, Dr. Al Gruele, and Dr. R.E. Davis. Finally, others are people or personae with whom I have a strictly parasocial or semi-parasocial relationship: Ed O'Neill, Gibby Haynes, Nihilist Gelo, Charlie Day, Doug Stanhope, Jess Hernandez.

The aforementioned people have shaped me and I hope, in turn, I have done my part to shape them in some positive ways. They have made the past five years of my life some of the best I have ever experienced, in spite of the difficult and at times terrifying work of being a graduate student. The most harrowing aspects of any graduate program are comprehensive exams and a dissertation. For getting through these, I owe a special debt of gratitude to my

committee: Dr. Lance Porter, Dr. Meghan Sanders, Dr. Kirby Goidel, Dr. James Honeycutt, and the Dean's representative, Dr. Lorraine Sims.

The chair of my master's thesis, Dr. Kent Wilkinson, once told me: "Make your committee members your friends." Though I enjoyed working as his graduate assistant, my initial dissertation advisor, Dr. Mike Xenos, left LSU before I could form a committee. What was my next step?

In Decemberish of 2010, and after a brief but enjoyable chat about nothing too important, Lance Porter came to my rescue. Around that time I was considering doing content analyses of Internet privacy agreements -- or something completely mind-numbing that would destroy the sanity and will to live for most human beings. Not only did Lance rescue me from not having a dissertation and externship advisor, he saved me (and continues to do so) from myself and my propensity to obsess over the tangential. Rarely have I ever enjoyed a chemistry with one whom I respect and one who inspires me to be greater than I feel myself to be. It is easy to be friends with Lance Porter, and, as is very important within the dissertation context of an advisor-advisee relationship, it is incredibly enjoyable to work with him on academic work.

During my initial visit to LSU, one of the last stops on the tour of the Manship School was the office of Dr. Kirby Goidel. As a master's student interviewing for acceptance into Ph.D. programs, the adrenaline, anxiety, and fear are incredibly high. One can either go through the process saying "Hey, this is who I am" or lie about how great one is. I'm a terrible liar and just went with the former. My conversation with Kirby revolved around "where do you see yourself in academia" and I told him the truth: "I have no idea but am open to new ones." This was no problem for Kirby -- he said something to the effect of "You never know where academia is going to take you." I guess my answers to his questions were acceptable. In honesty, I don't

remember the details, but consistent with my encounters with other Manship School students, the most salient aspect was one of positive rapport. Later Kirby accepted when I proposed to him the opportunity to guide my dissertation methods

Through a delightful twist of fate I was assigned as his graduate assistant in 2011-2012. This was a particularly advantageous situation because not only did I get some basic course management experience, he also had me working with data collected through Louisiana Public Forum broadcasts, as well as other smaller projects I found enjoyable and rewarding. Working with Kirby also gave me the advantage of proximity to a committee member; I was able to regularly ask him for advice and ideas pertaining to my dissertation and its methods.

I had the great fortune of Dr. Meghan Sanders having one available slot for a dissertation committee, along with her willingness to take me on as an advisee. Many Manship researchers focus their research on politics, sports, media practice, and other areas. Dr. Sanders is one of the few who have expertise and a publication history in the area of media effects as pertains to cognitive psychology. Her expertise and research interests were quite compatible with my own, and her knowledge and wisdom in the area proved to be critical as I pursued work on this topic. As a plus, I also adopted her binder system of organizing articles, which continues to keep my natural messiness at bay.

Dr. Meghan Sanders revolutionized my thinking about measurement. “You’re overthinking it,” she kept telling me. On this issue I agree with her to a point; I had to overthink it to eventually arrive at being able to think about it in a simpler manner. I am thankful for her patience and encouragement as I desperately tried to grasp the complexity of a manipulation check while translating it into something simple and practical. Of all the wheel-spinning I

engaged in during this dissertation, the experimental parts were, for me, the most frustrating. I could not have conducted the experiment without her support and guidance.

I also had the privilege of working part-time as Meghan's graduate assistant in Spring of 2010. As a supervisor, I have great respect for Meghan because she seems to assume the best of her employee. She gave me a problem to work on, I came back with a solution she did not seem to expect, and she allowed me to pursue it. To avoid tedious details, I will simply say it was a data organization problem and through some work I was able to reorganize the data and arrange it in a useable manner. It means a lot to me that she had enough faith in my work to allow me to solve the problem without intervention (though I will say she gave me some critical jumping-off points when I presented the plan for the solution). Indeed, I have learned a great deal from her. For my work and interactions with Meghan, I am very grateful.

In Fall of 2010 I stepped outside the Manship School and took a hybrid course in multivariate statistics and theories of conflict with Dr. James Honeycutt. I learned a great deal in his class, but perhaps the most important takeaway was that human imagination is a functional process. Sure, great innovations come out of imagination -- we often associate imagination with works of art, music, invention, and other things that have the potential to completely change how the masses think about certain topics. Yet this same set of processes is also responsible for how we manage our lives whether it is figuring out what we're going to tell our committee in a dissertation defense or how we're going to get out of bed, go to the bathroom, get dressed, drop the kid off at daycare, and get to work on time. Yes -- we are constantly imagining how our lives are going to play out and taking measures to act upon such imaginings. Ideas, scenarios, and other messages we pick up through media play a prominent role in our practical imaginative

functioning, and practical imaginative functioning, as James Honeycutt continues to demonstrate, is measurable.

Dr. Lorraine Sims is an incredibly charming person. Though a Graduate School Dean's Representative and not a "real" committee member, per se, I still recognize her as a part of the group that got me through the more difficult parts of the doctoral program. Dr. Sims is an opera singer and professor who knew my neighbor, the aforementioned Patrick Bachman; I hope Lorraine was not bored to tears by my discussions with the committee of multivariate statistics, parasocial processing, and other things far outside her world in our world of mass communication research. It is my hope she may have learned something in the process that may shape how she, a performer, has profound effects on audiences with her talent.

My goal in writing this section was to name names – to immortalize the people who influenced this work. No doubt I have missed people in this, be their contributions to the work at hand small or large. Though missed in this section, they are certainly not forgotten; I think of them at other times, and am aware of the value of their existences, and hope that I too may provide them with whatever value I can. That being said, let's get on with the work itself.

Thomas Phillip Madison

August 14, 2013

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined tolerance of polygamists as a result of exposure to television programming. Specifically, it looked at how audiences form attitudes toward the practice of polygamy and its participants in light of viewing its portrayals in popular television entertainment. Using historical research, semi-structured interviews, surveys of viewers and students, and an experiment, I explored the issue of tolerance among different types of Americans. The findings in these studies demonstrate that Americans never cared for polygamy and continue to find little appeal for its practice. Yet, we are captivated by television shows that focus on polygamy. Part of our habit of tuning in is related to how we process portrayals of individual polygamists; we compare ourselves with them, sometimes upwardly or downwardly, and may build parasocial bonds with them through our screens. I found strong support for the parasocial contact hypothesis, and argue that with positive portrayals over time, viewing individual characters in such shows could erode the sense of “divergence” we feel as a result of our unfamiliarity with the practice. On the other hand, negative and even mixed portrayals of polygamists can reinforce our existing stereotypes and prejudices.

INTRODUCTION

The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis proposed by Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) demonstrates that by viewing positive portrayals of people or groups different from ourselves or from our perceptions of the mainstream, we become more tolerant of those people or groups when we come into real-life contact with them. The more transsexuals, homosexuals, or others we see portrayed on television in a positive light, the more likely we are to accept them as human beings rather than anomalies when we actually interact with them. Gamson (1998) refers to the beauty and horror of talk shows as the “two-headed beast.” He expresses both revulsion and delight toward the talk show circuit. Talk shows give underprivileged or marginalized groups a voice. At the same time, talk shows exploit our differences and focus on conflict and sensationalism, often drowning out the voices of the marginalized or the underrepresented. This paradox is certainly not limited to daytime television; it is apparent in primetime, cable, and premium programming as well.

In the 1950s, Leon Festinger outlined *A Theory of Social Comparison Processes*. Comparing our abilities and opinions with those of others is a complex process with observable dynamics and results. Though initially observed in interpersonal settings, social comparison theory has explicit implications for attention to and enjoyment of mediated communication, namely television entertainment. To date, there is minimal research tying parasocial processes with social comparison theory. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that we often derive enjoyment from television through downward social comparison. Daytime television and talk shows offer a goldmine of characters with whom we can compare ourselves and feel superior, or at least better about our own lives. As this area needs to be addressed, the general topic of this dissertation

extends both social comparison theory and parasocial processing by exploring the idea of parasocial comparison.

The larger questions in this dissertation revolve around tolerance of others in light of our tendency toward social comparison. Can we look down on various groups and still accept their lifestyles? What role does enjoyment of television play in our real-life interactions? Are parasocial contact and social comparison mutually exclusive, complimentary, unrelated, or something else completely? What role does social comparison play in parasocial processing? To explore these questions, I will rely on several different methods for collecting data: a survey, an experiment, and qualitative interviews.

Fictional television affects us in many ways: some of them short-term and some of them long-term. I shed a tear or two when Bill Henrickson died. Bill was the patriarch of a fictional polygamous Mormon television family in the HBO series *Big Love*. The character had a beautiful family: three wives, seven kids, loyal friends, numerous in-laws running the character spectrum from pleasant to obnoxious to sinister to evil, as well as his share of enemies. In my lifetime, I have had no contact with polygamists and minimal contact with Mormons, and I imagine most of the world has had minimal contact with these groups as well. *Big Love* brought The Principle of plural marriage into our homes and presented it in a manner that left judgment of the practice to the audience. It provides an example of limited-voice groups that cannot be easily categorized as sensationalistic along with the characters we see on Maury Povich, Jerry Springer, and The People's Court.

According to Public Radio International, there are 30,000-50,000 people living a polygamist lifestyle in the US, many of whom are associated with splinter groups with belief systems similar to those of the Mormon church (*Polygamy in America*, 2010). With such small

numbers, I argue that polygamists are an underrepresented group in the U.S., and therefore their representation in entertainment media has relevance for their standing as Americans. By examining audience opinions toward polygamy in light of five seasons of *Big Love*, four seasons of *Sister Wives*, *The Dargers*, and continuing Warren Jeffs coverage, I seek to take advantage of a unique opportunity to study the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis and parasocial comparison.

Significance of Research

This dissertation will build theory by contributing to our understanding of parasocial relationships, their role in our learning tolerance for various groups in society, how we position ourselves within our parasociability, how parasocial relationships relate to entertainment, and how we parasocially compare ourselves with TV characters. The results of this dissertation provide information valuable to media researchers and may also make useful theoretical contributions to interpersonal communication researchers.

This dissertation has practical applications as well. Public relations practitioners have known for many years that various institutions have looked to entertainment productions as vehicles through which to present their image to audiences. For example, the armed services regularly provide Hollywood production companies with vehicles, shooting locations, script consultation, and extras in exchange for positive portrayals in entertainment media (Madison, 2011). The Air Force has protected and projected its desired image to global audiences through movies and television shows such as *Stargate SG1* and *Transformers*. The U.S. Coast Guard has also appeared in numerous prime-time programs such as *CSI: Miami* and *Deadliest Catch*. Product placement and even building entire scripts around particular brands is a major avenue advertisers are currently pursuing. In fact, “advertisers seeking to cash in on a halo effect for their products through a paid relationship with a beloved television show seem to be spending their

money well” (Porter & Sanders, 2011, p. 18). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to claim entertainment as an actual tool for encouraging social tolerance of underrepresented groups, but the implications are indeed there when we consider the theoretical basis. By influencing the production of entertainment content through various means, underrepresented groups can disseminate images and messages to larger audiences that have the potential to foster positive opinions toward such groups. The following section outlines the structure of this dissertation.

Outline

Chapter 1: Polygamy defines the concept of polygamy, notes the topic’s appearance in recent news and popular entertainment, gives a brief history of Mormonism in the U.S., and discussed historic and contemporary attitudes toward polygamy. Chapter 2: Literature Review offers a theoretical background for the dissertation and provides a literature review of parasocial interaction and social comparison. Chapter 3 synthesizes the literature, provides the variables to be measured, and presents the hypotheses and research questions involved in this study. Chapter 4: Interviews on Parasocial Comparison is a qualitative study that applies both social comparison and parasocial processing to interviewing descriptions of viewing experiences. Chapter 5: Surveys of Viewers and Students on Tolerance of Polygamy presents the results of surveys of viewers of polygamous shows and surveys of students and compares the findings, paying careful attention to differences in between the two groups and their levels of tolerance of both male and female polygamists. Chapter 6: Experiment on Tolerance of Polygamy presents the results of an experiment in which students are exposed to episodes of the show Big Love and tested on attitudes toward polygamy immediately after exposure. Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion elaborates on the findings of all three studies, ties them back to the literature, and offers

conclusions regarding public opinion toward polygamy and the influence of popular entertainment as a means of increasing tolerance of underrepresented groups.

CHAPTER 1: POLYGAMY

Definition of Polygamy

Before exploring historical and contemporary attitudes toward polygamy, we must provide an operational definition for the concept. Zeitzen (2004) offers the following definition of polygamy:

... the practice whereby a person is married to more than one spouse at the same time ... there are three forms of polygamy: polygyny, in which one man is married to several wives; polyandry, where a woman is married to several husbands; and group marriage, in which several husbands are married to several wives, i.e. some combination of polygyny and polyandry. (P. 3)

Mormon polygamy is exclusively polygyny and Mormon fundamentalists, as Bennion (2012) tells us, “prefer ‘the Work,’ ‘the Principle,’ or ‘Celestial Marriage’” (p. XVI) to the term polygyny.

Popular entertainment in America (so far) has not tackled the theme of polyandry to the extent it has polygamy, though it is a relevant tangent. Could it one day? Author Janet Bennion says, “I’m finding ... a rationale for polyandry. I had a ... man call me recently, and he said, ‘I’m angry at the polygamists because they’re hoarding all the women.’” There are a lot of men who might at this point be interested in the alpha female. We’re opening up to new and creative sexual forms in order to deal with our socioeconomic crisis. So stay tuned” (Harrison, 2012, Paragraph 25). For now, however, polyandry is not on any list of more popular entertainment themes. A search for “polyandry” through Google News (March 7., 2013) revealed only 247 news stories, most of which include both the terms polyandry and polygamy, and usually associated with a law banning the practices. Searching for news articles on “polygamy,” by contrast, returned almost 8000 news stories. Polygyny is a far more common form of polygamy and is generally referenced as simply “polygamy.” Therefore, and for the sake of simplicity, I

use the term “polygamy” throughout this document as a surrogate for “polygyny,” and to refer to the practice of one man cohabitating with multiple wives, and to children who are cohabitating with multiple mothers. Understanding these distinctions is important as we explore polygamy in the recent news.

Polygamy in the News: The Yearning for Zion (YFZ) Ranch

Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints (FLDS) leader and “Prophet” Warren Jeffs had a reputation for marrying underage girls and a history of dodging authorities in Utah and Arizona (Singular, 2008) before his highly-reported arrest outside Eldorado, TX and subsequent trial in San Angelo, TX. Jeffs and his 700 followers had built the Yearning for Zion (YFZ) Ranch on 1700 acres (*Behind ...*, p. 3) of west Texas desert. Prosecutors argued that Jeffs had 78 wives, with 24 of them under the legal age of 17, but charged him only with sexual assault of a twelve-year old and a fifteen-year old (Richey, 2011). Warren Jeffs received two life sentences in the San Angelo state district court and Sonia Smith, writer for the magazine *Texas Monthly* argues that with an ongoing and well-financed mail out campaign featuring apocalyptic themes, he is “determined to keep newspapers in business” (Smith, S., 26-Jan., 2012, ¶1). Though Jeffs is currently imprisoned, journalists continue to report on Jeffs and his followers and Americans continue to have a source of information on polygamists that is predominantly negative.

Polygamy in Popular Entertainment

As popular entertainment reporter Donna Freydkin (2010) accurately notes, “polygamists are multiplying on the small screen” (¶ 1). *Lone Star* (FOX), *Sister Wives* (TLC), and *Big Love* (HBO) as well as novels such as *The 19th Wife*, *Escape*, and *The Lonely Polygamist* have emerged on television or arrived at bookstores in recent years (Freydkin, 2010). According to

Bennion (2012), *Big Love* and *Sister Wives* “delivered drama sympathetic to polygamists to a combined audience of more than four million people each week” (p. 1).

Opinions regarding portrayal of polygamy in popular entertainment are mixed. *Big Love*’s ambiguity, as Hannah (2010) tells us, could serve as a model for making legal decisions involving families. On the other hand, those in the religious press who view polygamy as a threat to conventional cultural norms (i.e. Colson & George, 2011) often invoke religious expectations associated with family and sexuality, specifically heterosexual monogamy.

Indeed, Colson & George (1-Oct., 2011) take a decidedly negative view of polygamy and the effects generated by its representation in popular culture before asking, “What are Americans learning from sympathetic portrayals of polygamy in popular culture?” (p. 70). They fail to cite any specific sources but suggest studies exist that tie higher levels of domestic abuse, infant mortality, and something the authors call “daughter swapping.” Presumably, this is a practice through which a male polygamist increases his number of wives through cooperation with other polygamists, but due to a lack of citation, it may be akin to the “Rainbow Parties” of urban legend. Moreover, they claim (possibly accurately) that polygamy deprives “children of the singular devotion of a loving father and mother” (p. 70).

Beyond moral editorializing, Colson & George (1-Oct., 2011) do make an astute observation that fits well with the parasocial contact hypothesis; “It began with making what was once marginalized and tolerated seem normal and mainstream by calling into question the very idea of norms. Pop culture excels at perpetuating this kind of relativism: gay characters were depicted as interchangeable with, if not superior to, their heterosexual counterparts” (p. 70). As Bennion (2012) argues, polygamy has indeed become a part of primetime culture; its depiction in entertainment is sexier and more progressive than the depictions the news often delivers. She

asks, “Who can resist these good-looking charismatic personalities [Bill Henrickson of *Big Love*; Kody Brown of *Sister Wives*] who want to open up their polygamous lifestyles to the world?” (p. 3).

Others (i.e. Hannah, 2010) view polygamy as inspirational. Hannah (2010), for example, offers *Big Love* as a model from which to build family law. She seeks to find principled means of distinguishing between intimate relationships in which some kind of harm is done to one of the parties, and those relationships in which the state alleges that moral or social harm *could* occur by virtue of the nature of the relationship. *Big Love*, Hannah (2010) tells us, offers excellent examples from which to examine this topic. She concludes that “the future of feminist legal theory depends on its ability to remain ambivalent about the tensions presented in the present doctrine as applied to contexts such as polygamy, prostitution, sadomasochistic sex, obscenity, and domestic violence” (p. 112). “*Big Love*,” she further argues, “seeks to persuade us to accept ambivalence and to be open to changing our minds because of the complicated nature of women’s (and men’s) lives ...” (p. 112).

Still others zero in on the “mixedness” of positive and negative attributes that the topic provides. In an interview with Donna Freydkin, the author of the novel *The 19th Wife* (2009) David Ebershoff states:

You just can't quickly dismiss polygamy or embrace it. As a country, we haven't quite wrapped our minds around this. It goes straight to core American values. Polygamy asks us to think about religious freedom, the right to privacy, and are there limits to those rights? And if there are, who determines them? It's this moral murkiness that draws us in," says Ebershoff. (Freydkin, 2010)

Whether we are drawn to the complexity and ambiguity of the practice as described by Hannah (2010), the questions of American values and identity (Freydkin, 2010), or something else entirely, one thing is clear: portrayals of polygamy attract television audiences (Bennion, 2012). It seems whatever moral judgment we may hold for the practice does not preclude our

fascination with the topic and therefore our entertainment preferences. The following sections briefly describe two of the more recent shows revolving around polygamous families: *Big Love* and *Sister Wives*.

Big Love

Big Love starred Bill Paxton as “Bill Henrickson” with actresses Jeanne Tripplehorn as his wife “Barbara Henrickson”, Chloe Sevigny as his second wife “Nicki Grant”, and Jennifer Goodwin as his third wife “Margene Hefner” (*Big Love (2006-2011)*, 2013). The show followed the fictional polygamous spouses and their eight children living in three adjacent homes in an otherwise nondescript suburban neighborhood near Salt Lake City, Utah. Supporting characters included Bill’s monogamous brother “Joey,” Nicki’s father, Roman Grant (played by Harry Dean Stanton) and his child-bride Rhonda Volmer (Daveigh Chase), as well as Bill’s mother Lois (Grace Zabriskie) and abusive father Frank (Bruce Dern), all of whom cause great difficulties for the seemingly-stable Henrickson family (*Big Love*, 2012).

The television show *Big Love* borrows heavily from the trials, tribulations, and pursuits associated with Jeffs and his followers (*The Experts Corner...*, 20-Aug, 2007). The show ran from 2006 through 2011 and approximately 1.57 million viewers tuned in to HBO for the *Big Love* season finale in 2011 (Seidman, 22-Mar., 2011). With the demise of *Big Love*, has America’s fascination with polygamy receded in the past couple of years? *Big Love* writer Will Scheffer says, “I don’t want to see any more real-life polygamy. People have been turned off by the idea of polygamy — there’s a yuck factor,” he says. “When we started, people didn’t know much about it and were really interested by this subculture. And then Warren Jeffs and his compound exploded in the news. We were at the right place at the right time” (Freydkin, 2010, ¶ 16). Though Scheffer admits *he* does not want to see more polygamy, America itself seems to be

saying something different. As of 2013, the reality show *Sister Wives* is in its fifth season and does not appear to be losing any steam as it continues to shape audience attitudes toward polygamy.

Sister Wives

The reality show *Sister Wives* debuted in October, 2010 on The Learning Channel (TLC). According to a video from *The Today Show*, “*Sister Wives* takes viewers inside the [sic] relationship of one man [Kody Brown] with three wives and the addition of wife number four ... This is the kind of lifestyle that most people would not embrace and certainly don’t understand” (*TLC Sister Wives...*, 2010). In *Sister Wives*, TLC follows the day-to-day activities of Brown and his wives Meri, Christine, Janelle, and Robyn, as well as those of their thirteen children.

While many of the *Big Love* storylines were influenced by the goings-on associated with real-life polygamist and “Prophet” Warren Jeffs (Freydkin, 2010), the very motivation behind the Brown family in *Sister Wives* reflects a similar premise behind much of seasons 4 and 5 of *Big Love*, in which the character Bill Henrickson runs for state office in an attempt to decriminalize polygamy in Utah. Kizer (14-Jan., 2011) argues that “when Brown and his four wives were asked, during their media rounds, why they decided to allow cameras into their complicated household, they always cited a desire to gain greater acceptance of what they say is an upstanding, faith-based, modern-day polygamist lifestyle” (§ 3). Like the producers of *Big Love*, the Brown family seeks to educate audiences about their particular brand of polygamy. Rather than choosing politics and legislation, as the fictional character Bill Henrickson did in *Big Love*, the Browns and TLC have chosen reality television as a means to foster among non-polygamists a normalization of and, therefore, greater acceptance of people who practice polygamy.

American Attitudes Toward Polygamy

Polygamy has been practiced in numerous cultures throughout human history. In fact, 85 percent of all recorded societies have been polygamous (Murdock, 1967), making monogamous, nuclear families a relatively unusual lifestyle. Today, researchers have studied contemporary polygamy in China, Australia, Africa, Malaysia, India, the U.S., to name but a few, as well as their various diasporas (Zeitzen, 2004) in other countries. How have Americans historically viewed polygamy? This chapter offers a general overview of how Americans have viewed the practice of polygamy since the 1820s, when Joseph Smith first picked up the magical spectacles.

Invoking Gamson's (1998) metaphor for daytime television talk shows, polygamy in the U.S. might also be considered a "two-headed beast." Aggregate American attitudes toward the practice have typically been negative for at least two hundred years, and have resulted in various types of legislation against the practice throughout different periods of history (Embry, 1987).

Yet at the same time Americans tend to find the concept of plural marriage compelling. Clearly, the topic of polygamy has some ability to draw audiences. Nielsen & Cragun (2010) confirm that "although polygamy remains illegal in Utah and the rest of the United States, and the LDS church renounced it over a century ago, public fascination with it continues" (p. 762). Chitwood (27-Jul., 2007) makes note of the topic's appearance in popular entertainment.

To slake the American public's thirst for polygamous story lines there is no shortage of news coverage on Jeffs, the leader of a small, if not outrageous, Mormon sect and Hollywood has banked in on plural marriage with the hits *Big Love* and *Sister Wives*. Furthermore, there are several best-selling books on the shelves telling the stories of polygamy and individuals' harrowing tales from inside the FLDS. All the while we, the American people, seemingly can't get enough. (§ 7)

This dissertation examines the effects on audiences of portrayals of polygamy in popular entertainment, and focus exclusively on polygyny -- an arrangement in which one man is married to two (bigamy) or more wives simultaneously. This form of polygamy may be *sororal*, (in

which the wives are related to each other, or *non-sororal*, in which the wives are not related (Embry, 1987; Zeitzen, 2004) except through marriage to a common husband. Though many cultures have included polygamy among their family practices, its practice among Americans has been and continues to be associated with Mormonism.

Brief History of Mormonism

Engaging the topic of Mormon polygamy without providing the historical context in which it emerged would be unfair or incomplete at best. This section, admittedly, does not chronicle all of the events and circumstances that led to the practice of Mormon polygamy in the present day, but provides an enriching background with which to build this dissertation.

Mormonism began with a series of unique spiritual events experienced by Joseph Smith in the 1800s. Mormons believe, as Singular (2008) tells us, that in 1820, two supernatural figures approached fourteen-year old Joseph Smith, one of whom was Jesus Christ, who told Smith that “all creeds were an abomination in his sight.” Three years later Smith was approached by another supernatural figure, an angel named Moroni, who revealed the location of hidden gold plates covered in hieroglyphics and “stones wrapped in silver bows which would help the young man decipher the foreign text” (p. 8).

As Zeitzen (2008) suggests, various forms of Christianity have never quite reconciled how followers should live with both the New Testament and the Old Testament, particularly as pertains to quotidian practices. Joseph Smith served as the channel for a series of revelations that would later form the basis of Mormonism. Among the reconciliations between biblical principles was polygamy; “the LDS Church believed plural marriage was instituted and practiced by the earliest prophets of the Old Testament, and was restored anew to earth for the Mormon people of the nineteenth century by direct revelation from God to their prophet” (p. 89).

In the early Mormon Church, polygamy was not the norm among members. “During the 1840s, only selected leaders knew about the practice of polygamy and married plural wives. They used code words in an attempt to conceal the practice from enemies of the Church and most Church members and issued public statements denying that they were practicing polygamy” (Embry, 1987, p. 7). Based on their concealment of the practice, we can comfortably argue that early Mormons themselves, as a group, were of similar mind to other Americans at the time, or at least divided on the topic. How have monogamist Americans viewed polygamy?

Historic American Attitudes Toward Polygamy

According to Embry (1987), professor of Romantic languages John Cairncross’ history of polygamy indicates that “polygamy was not seen as violating the Christian tradition until A.D. 600 when the Catholic Church consolidated its power in Rome” (p. 4). The Catholic Church also encouraged polygamy around 1650 after the Thirty Years War to help rebuild the population in Germany. Later, Embry (1987) argues, Joseph Smith’s mission, beginning in the 1820s, promoted polygamy.

Most Americans at the time thought poorly of polygamy and attacked Mormons and other polygamists with legislation. “Reactions from outside the Church [LDS] ... about polygamy were immediate and negative. In 1854 the Republican Party termed polygamy and slavery the ‘twin relics of barbarism’” (Embry, 1987, p. 8). Members of the Mormon Church were forced to emigrate to Utah as a result, and continuing the practice of polygamy later caused problems for acquiring statehood for Utah (Nielsen & Cragun, 2010).

Fundamentally, polygamy is an issue of sexuality (Nielsen & Cragun, 2010) in the public mind. This makes it questionable by many religiously-based sexual mores. Along with religion-

based views of morality, polygamy has also been targeted for what appear to be racial issues.

Clayton (1979) ties polygamy to immigration.

During the 1860 Congressional debate on polygamy, a majority of the congressmen who spoke argued that polygamy was degrading to women, an adjunct to political despotism and that it encouraged promiscuity and broke up the family circle. Equally important, polygamy was against the moral sentiments of Christendom. Those who practiced this form of marriage tended to be poor, recent immigrants, submissive and uneducated. Without the slightest hint of religious bigotry, several congressmen indicated that polygamy simply went beyond what was tolerable in America and that for a society to be considered moral, lines had to be drawn somewhere. (P.48)

Congress in 1860 seems to have “sterilized” its stand against polygamy with a non-racial argument, possibly because its target was a specific religion of mostly non-immigrant whites. America is not the only place that has taken a legislative stand against polygamy. In England after World War II, laws regarding polygamy developed in-part due to assimilationist attitudes; immigrants from south Asia and other countries in which polygamy was the norm were expected to conform to British ideas of matrimony (Shah, 2003).

Several laws appeared in the latter half of the nineteenth century that attempted to control or criminalize polygamy. The Morrill Act, signed by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, “prohibited plural marriage in the territories, disincorporated The Church, and restricted the Church’s ownership of property to \$50,000” (Embry, 1987, p. 8). Utah responded by asking Congress to repeal the act, which led the House Judiciary Committee to ask why the Morrill Act was not being enforced, which then led Shelby Cullom, a representative from Illinois, to introduce the Cullom bill in 1870 to strengthen the Morrill act. Women, as Embry (1987) argues, had recently been granted the right to vote, and protested. Furthermore, railroad financial interests and lobbying kept the Cullom bill from moving beyond the House of Representatives, though parts of it were later recycled into other bills.

In 1882 Congress passed the Edmunds Act, which strengthened the Morrill Act, making polygamy a felony and punishable with a fine and jail time while cohabitation remained a punishable misdemeanor. It did little to control Utah polygamy, and in 1887 Congress passed the Edmunds-Tucker bill, which created additional means for attacking the practice by compelling wives to testify against husbands and dissolving Church funding for projects, among other things (Embry, 1987).

Phipps (2009) makes the compelling argument that anti-polygamy views in the late part of the nineteenth century lacked the modern idea of polygamy as “antithetical to a deeply-rooted tradition of monogamous marriage” (p. 486). Instead, she argues, anti-polygamists were unable to clearly articulate their argument against the practice, forcing the rhetoric to take shape from the characteristics of the “evils” of the time: Chinese immigrants, Southern slave power, and defeated Confederates.

Not only were arguments from tradition remarkably absent from Republican anti-polygamy rhetoric -- anti-polygamists were prepared to do considerable violence to traditional domestic relations law practices in service to their goal. At times, Republican anti-polygamists saw their campaign for monogamous marriage in Utah as the pursuit of a new, unrealized vision for the nation, not the preservation or reconstruction of the ways of the past. (P. 486)

In other words, strong political forces in the nineteenth century sought legislation against polygamy for what may be seen as “progressive” reasons. Though the polygamy rhetoric in the public sphere has changed, and therefore the rationales we use to justify our beliefs, we still see the same phenomenon in modern America: the majority of people do not like the idea of polygamy.

Contemporary American Attitudes Toward Polygamy

In spite of shared cultural symbolism, attitudes toward polygamy among Mormons have become quite divergent (Kilbride, 1994). “Given the intense national and local stigma attached to

polygamous marriage, polygamy today is confined to entire fundamentalist Mormon communities that are committed to its practice” (p. 71). The American public, however, appears less divided on the issue than Mormons.

Nielsen (2006) and later Nielsen & Cragun (2010) explored the effects of demographics on American attitudes toward polygamy. Two of the more salient themes that emerged with particular pertinence to the current study were that level of education and personal contact with polygamists are associated with greater tolerance of polygamy.

Nielsen (2006) surveyed over 2,400 people who either claimed membership in the LDS church or were connected with it in some manner. He found several factors that influenced attitudes toward polygamists. Age was a factor; younger LDS church-goers were less tolerant of polygamy than older churchgoers, and tolerance leveled out among people in their 40s and 50s. Education was also associated with increased tolerance for polygamy. Knowing one or being a polygamist was associated with more favorable attitudes toward the practice. This particular finding points directly to the Social Contact Hypothesis, and as previously explained, the work at hand extends this hypothesis to parasocial contact.

In an extension of Nielsen’s (2006) demographic research, Nielsen & Cragun (2010) also assessed religiosity, attitudes toward sexuality (i.e. monogamous values), and perception of Mormons as Christians by non-Mormons in relation to tolerance of polygamy. They found that sexual attitudes significantly predict positive attitudes toward polygamy among non-Mormons. It is noteworthy that this finding applied to both Mormons and other Christians, but did not apply to polygamists themselves. Based on this, the authors argue that polygamists themselves do not consider polygamy as an alternative sexual practice, indicating a fundamentally different view of polygamy from the majority of Americans. The authors clearly note “their [polygamist] views

toward alternative sexual practices are disassociated from their views toward polygamy” (p. 767).

In other words, people who do not practice it tend to sexualize polygamy, an imaginative process which clearly contributes to attitudes and beliefs about polygamists. When asked by the *Today Show* why he chose polygamy as a lifestyle, Kody Brown of *Sister Wives* simply answered, “Oh shoot, it was faith-based.” His first wife, Mary added “It’s faith -- it’s a faith decision” (*TLC Sister Wives...*, 2010).

One limitation of Neilsen’s (2006) and Neilsen & Cragun’s (2010) data is the purposive, non-random nature of the samples. Though both studies shine a rare light on reclusive communities, these studies certainly should not be considered representative of any aggregate American opinions. Several studies, however, have examined American attitudes toward Mormonism, and provide additional information regarding public opinion of polygamy.

Keeter (2007), in association with Pew Research, surveyed 1,461 Americans and asked them to use a single word to describe their impression of Mormonism. Slightly more Americans offered negative words (27%) to describe Mormonism than positive words (23%), with about 19% offering neutral descriptions. Family and devotion to faith among Mormons were other themes that emerged as existing in the minds of Americans. Keeter (2007) also found strong association between the concepts of polygamy/bigamy/other plural marriage with Mormonism in the minds of Americans. These findings are not necessarily indicative of negative attitudes toward polygamy -- or Mormonism, but clearly demonstrate that Mormonism and polygamy are persistently associated together in the minds of Americans. They also indicate the perception that attitudes toward Mormonism, in light of the association with polygamy are mixed, rather than purely negative.

As recently as 2004, polygamy also became an issue when the U.S. was negotiating a transfer of 14,000 Hmong refugees from camps in Thailand. This did not bode well with certain parts of the American public, who found polygamy irreconcilable with their values. In practice, the Hmong families were allowed to live in the U.S. as family units after forced divorces that resulted in only one *documented* wife per husband. Polygamy remains a felony in Minnesota and is a deportable offense (Zeitzen, 2008; *see also Form I-140 instructions or USC*), but it is difficult to stop *de facto* practice.

In light of recent controversy over gay marriage, polygamy has also become a topic of debate, as civil rights and the institution of marriage come into question. Kody Brown, the patriarch of Sister Wives offered his understanding of marriage as a civil rights issue. “It is something I have thought about a lot, and I feel very blessed that I have been able to choose love and the life that I want to live and be married to the people that I want to be married to. It’s not for me to decide or stop anyone else from marrying the person they love,” (McKay, ¶2). Indeed, the issue of polygamy has also become a point of friction between gay marriage advocates and polygamist marriage advocates, who both frame their arguments in terms of civil rights (Zeitzen, 2008). In a National Public Radio interview with Michel Martin, writer Jonathan Rauch noted:

...the problem with it is that it almost invariably means one man, multiple wives, and when one man takes two wives, some other man gets no wife ... a lot of people lose the opportunity to marry and you get societies where you've got a lot of unmarried young males who are very unhappy, a lot of social disruption, a lot of violence. And there's a whole academic literature on this. Gay marriage changes none of that. In fact, gay marriage leads us away from that to a society where everyone can marry. (*Would gay marriage lead to polygamy?*, ¶15-16).

Recall that despite an official stance against polygamy by the Latter Day Saints, many Americans still have a persistent association between Mormonism and polygamy (Keeter, 2007). These numbers paint an interesting, if somewhat surprising picture. First, Americans have a generally favorable (57%) view of Mormons. Second, and falling in line with Nielsen’s (2006)

findings, increasing education is a factor in one's increasing positive attitude toward Mormons. College graduates tend to have a favorable attitude toward Mormons (64%) while people with a high school education or less have higher rates of unfavorable views (31%) toward Mormons. Among the religious, attitudes toward Mormons are generally favorable, particularly among White mainline Protestants, but we see a greater proportion of unfavorable to favorable views among White evangelicals. Political orientation regarding views toward Mormons does not appear differ from the aggregate, but we do see slightly less unfavorable views toward Mormons among non-partisan Independent voters. The following chart gives a breakdown of favorable/unfavorable attitudes toward Mormons by non-Mormons.

Table 1.1
Views of Mormons*

<u>Among</u>	<u>Favorable %</u>	<u>Unfavorable %</u>	<u>No Opinion%</u>
Total	53	27	20=100
College Grad	64	21	15=100
Some College	64	21	17=100
HS or Less	45	31	24=100
Protestant	50	31	19=100
White Evangelical	46	39	15=100
White Mainline	62	21	17=100
Black protestant	42	28	30=100
Catholic	55	22	23=100
White Non-Hispanic	59	21	20=100
Unaffiliated	52	30	18=100
Republican	54	31	15=100
Democrat	53	28	19=100
Independent	55	24	21=100

*Taken from Keeter, S. (4-Dec., 2007). Public opinion about Mormons: Mitt Romney discusses his religion. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved May 15, 2012 from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/648/romney-mormon>.

In summary, American attitudes toward polygamy have generally been negative. In the nineteenth century, attitudes were such that legislation in various states was created to stop its practice. Though still practiced today by some members of the Fundamentalist Latter-Day Saints, research is scant regarding American opinions of polygamy. In fact, many Americans still associate Mormonism with polygamy, though the practice was officially banned by the Church more than a century ago.

In recent years polygamy has become the topic of several popular television shows. The following chapter presents a theoretical basis for understanding how Americans process what we see on television. In light of the popularity of *Big Love* and *Sister Wives*, with their often-times positive portrayals of polygamous lifestyles, are American attitudes toward polygamy changing?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section reviews the literature on social comparison. Leon Festinger (1954) laid out the original theory of social comparison as a set of hypotheses and corollaries supported by extensive psychological experimentation. Though social comparison has appeared in studies on media use (e.g. Greenwood & Pietromonaco, 2008; Oxley, 2010; Theran, Newberg, & Gleason, 2010), Dijkstra, et al. (2010) suggest the framework has been used more often for studying dissatisfaction, depression, and burnout. An important principle of social comparison is that, often, it is directional (Hakmiller, 1966; Buunk, Oldersma, & de Dreu, 2001; Buunk, Kuyper, and Van der Zee, 2005). When we engage in downward comparison, we often feel superior to those with whom we are comparing ourselves. When we engage in upward social comparison, we often feel inferior to those with whom we are comparing ourselves (Buunk, Kuyper, and Van der Zee, 2005). Does the direction of comparison, when we compare ourselves with television characters, have similar effects on our affective states as it does when we compare ourselves with real-life acquaintances? In this dissertation I will explore and test the relationships between social comparison and parasocial processes.

Social Comparison

For years, uses and gratifications researchers have argued that audiences tend to approach television characters in many of the same ways as we do interpersonal relationships (e.g. Auter, 1992; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Turner, 1993). One important dynamic of interpersonal relationships is our tendency to compare ourselves with other people. Festinger (1954) presented his Theory of Social Comparison as a collection of hypotheses supported by extensive experimental research.

As Dijkstra, Gibbons, and Buunk (2010) tell us, “social comparison is an important, if not central, characteristic of human social life” (p. 195). Several studies have investigated social

comparison with mediated personae in relation to body image (e.g. Greenwood & Pietromonaco, 2008; Oxley, 2010; Theran, Newberg, & Gleason, 2010). For the most part, however, the theory has been used to explain various aspects of interpersonal relationships, and spurred a good deal of subsequent research into the phenomenon (e.g. Buunk, Oldersma, & Dreu, 2001; Buunk, Kuyper, & Van der Zee, 2005; Hakmiller, 1966; Gilbert, Price, and Allen, 1995). Though these studies stopped short of tying social comparison processes with television viewing, their findings have important implications for parasocial studies, or those studies involving interaction and/or relationships with mediated personae. When we seek to compare our opinions and abilities with those of others, we are not limited by acquaintance; we certainly compare ourselves with television personae, and it affects our viewing choices and habits.

Rather than audience-media relationships, however, the social comparison framework has been explored mostly in relation to burnout, depression, and body dissatisfaction (Dijkstra, et al., 2010). Only a few studies have explored social comparison with mediated personae (e.g., Oxley, 2010; Theran et al., 2010), despite the fact that Americans spend more time watching television than we do engaging in interpersonal activities (*American Time Use Survey*, 2010). Considering American television use and the thoroughly explored field of social comparison theory, the idea that people often engage in *parasocial* comparison is a comfortable and intuitive assumption.

Comparison processes have strong implications for the concept of parasocial processing as described by Schramm & Hartmann (2006), and therefore may influence our tolerance of people whom we perceive to be different than ourselves. If this is correct, parasocial contact with televised personae has the potential to offer a means of eroding ignorance-based discrimination. Before examining the parasocial phenomenon, let us first explore the dynamics of social comparison theory.

At the root of our propensity for social comparison is Festinger's (1954) hypothesis that among humans, there is a drive to evaluate our opinions and abilities. Abilities are tested through performance and subsequently evaluated. Festinger (1954) argues that accurate evaluations of opinions and abilities are functional, and that inaccurate assessments "can be punishing or fatal in many situations" (p. 117). Most situations that we run into in which we seek to test our opinion exist in grey areas and may involve a mixture of opinion and ability evaluation, which gives rise to appraisal-seeking behaviors. We have a tendency to want to be correct in our appraisals. Television provides us with many worlds of characters with whom we may compare ourselves, and our propensity for social comparison with mediated personae is measurable in our parasocial interactions with and processing of TV characters.

Festinger's second hypothesis was that "to the extent that objective, non-social means are not available, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison respectively with the opinions and abilities of others" (p. 118). Some opinions are not testable within the bounds of the physical world but outside the context of other people. Festinger offers political candidates and the inevitability of wars as examples and suggests that sometimes, even when we do have physical referents for testing opinions, they may go untested. As an example he cites the old belief that tomatoes were once considered poisonous. People didn't want to test that belief because they thought they may die in the process.

Festinger (1954) added a corollary to this hypothesis: "In the absence of both a physical and social comparison, subjective evaluations of opinions and abilities are unstable" (p. 119). Definitions of good and poor performance fluctuate when we have nothing to compare them with, even after repeating the same task over and over again. The same holds true when we evaluate our opinions. Our evaluations are meaningless without cues, criteria, or other evidence

with which to compare them. But, “when an objective, non-social basis for the evaluation of one’s ability or opinion is readily available, persons will not evaluate their opinions or abilities by comparison with others” (p. 120). We may instead use our prior performance on tasks, prior opinions, or some other measurements that do not come from other people with which to compare the ones we currently hold.

An experiment by Hochbaum (1953) lent support to this proposition. Some students were told they were good at judging things correctly while others were told they were very poor at judgment. When confronted with other opinions, those who were told they were not good at judging things were more prone to change their opinion than those who were told they were good. Therefore, “the tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between his opinion or ability and one’s own increases” (p. 120). Festinger (1954) refers to this difference as “divergence,” which is a key concept within social comparison theory.

Divergence

Divergence, Festinger (1954) argued, comes from doing extremely better or extremely worse than someone else on a task. Such a discrepancy in performance fails to give us a basis for evaluation of our own performance with which we feel comfortable. This has intuitive appeal when it comes to opinions, as we may not compare the validity of our own opinions with opinions that we consider to be extreme. Festinger (1954) suggests that we simply classify people with extremely different opinions than our own as a different group, thus effectively offering an excuse or lukewarm explanation for our divergent opinions. People willing to commit suicide to kill others in the name of their god is, arguably, quite divergent from what most people would consider acceptable behavior. Therefore, we label these people as “terrorists” or “religious

extremists” and do not compare ourselves with these people because we consider them to be categorically different from ourselves.

Such strong divergence in opinion or abilities tends to shut down the social comparison process. As Festinger (1954) tells us, “a college student, for example, does not compare himself to inmates of an institution for the feeble minded to evaluate his own intelligence” (p. 120).

Indeed, ‘if the only comparison available is a very divergent one, the person will not be able to make a subjectively precise evaluation of his opinion or ability’ (p. 129). When opinions between a person and one with whom he or she compares himself become too divergent, the comparison function tends to shut down. Moreover, we have a tendency to choose people more like ourselves with whom to compare our own opinions or abilities: “Given a range of possible persons for comparison, someone close to one’s own ability or opinion will be chosen for comparison” (p. 121). In support of this, Festinger (1954) cites an experiment by Whittemore (1925) in which students competed against each other and later said they selected people with performance similar to their own to compete against.

“In short,” Festinger (1954) tells us, “comparison with the performance of others specifies what his ability should be and gives stability to the evaluations” (p. 122). Furthermore, Festinger (1954) offers the following regarding opinions.

Those who discover that most others in the group disagree with them become relatively less confident that their opinion is correct and a goodly portion change their opinion. Those who discover that most others in the group agree with them become highly confident in their opinion and it is extremely rare to find one of them changing his opinion. Again, comparison with others has tended to define what is a correct opinion and had given stability to the evaluation (p. 122)

It seems that the perception of one’s “being right” is an important part of human psychology that leads to comparison behaviors. Moreover, “being right” is often the function of perceiving oneself to hold the same opinion as one perceives the majority of others to hold.

“A person will be less attracted to situations where others are very divergent from him than to situations where others are close to him for both abilities and opinions” (p. 123). This diminished attraction is related to selective exposure and has particular relevance for television viewing. Too much divergence in content coupled with almost infinite opportunities for entertainment through modern technology will likely lead to a person settling on an entertainment choice offering content and addressing issues that are generally or relatively less divergent from one’s opinions. The bias toward the consonant is, in fact, the basis of selective exposure as a means of alleviating or avoiding cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In general, people are less attracted to those with opinions they perceive to be far different from their own. The same does not hold true for abilities, as people seem to want to “prove themselves” when they find their own abilities are inferior to the group. We tend to want a second chance when it comes to abilities. To prove our worth, we need witnesses.

Festinger furthers: “The existence of a discrepancy in a group with respect to opinions or abilities will lead to action on the part of members of that group to reduce the discrepancy” (p. 124). With opinions, there is a general move by the group members toward uniformity to achieve what Festinger (1954) calls *social quiescence*. With abilities, non-social constraints make uniformity much more difficult to achieve. I will never play football as well as any member of a college football team, and being able to do so would take extraordinary, unrealistic means. However, I may be able to find enough in common with the university team – opinion wise—that I may be able to reshape some of my existing opinions to decrease divergence in our thinking, and be able to achieve some sort of social quiescence with them should I run into them at a local bar on a Friday night.

Changing Opinions

“When a discrepancy exists with respect to opinions or abilities there will be tendencies to change one’s own position so as to move closer to others in the group” as well as to “change others in the group to bring them closer to oneself” (Festinger, 1954, p. 126). In other words, we may change our opinions to fit those that we perceive the group to hold while using some process of lobbying or something similar, attempting to convince the individuals within the group to come closer toward a halfway point between our own opinions and the group’s opinions. “When differences of opinion exist, and pressures toward uniformity arise, these pressures are manifested in an influence process. Members attempt to influence one another, existing opinions become less stable, and change occurs” (p. 126). Once uniformity is reached, Festinger tells us, the influence process ceases. This process may not yield fruit within the context of negotiating the television world, as mediated personae cannot respond to our lobbying.

Recalling Festinger’s (1954) hypotheses regarding divergence, “when a discrepancy exists with respect to opinions or abilities there will be tendencies to cease comparing oneself with those in the group who are very different from oneself” (p. 128). This particular derivation has strong implications for everything from workplaces to politics. When comparison ceases, there is a tendency, Festinger (1954) tells us, for one group to redefine the other group “so as to exclude those members whose opinions are most divergent from one’s own” (p. 128). This derivation has particular relevance for the parasocial contact hypothesis; we may have already redefined groups such as transsexuals and polygamists within our minds and write off their opinions as being those of a group far different from our own. Yet as we increase our contact with such groups through media use -- as we spend more time parasocially comparing ourselves

with them -- we may find we have more in common with them than we initially believed.

Finding such commonalities through comparison may increase our tolerance; however, it is still possible that we may continue to find them so categorically different from ourselves that we cease to engage in the comparison process.

Ceasing the social comparison among divergent groups may not be a good thing. As Festinger tells us regarding opinions (as opposed to abilities), “cessation of comparison with others is accompanied by hostility or derogation to the extent that continued comparison with those persons implies unpleasant consequences” (p. 129). An experiment by Festinger, Schachter, & Back (1950) showed that low scorers eventually acknowledged the superiority of high scorers and began competing with each other. This dynamic plays out in junior high schools across America: once the pecking order is established, the pecking order begins attacking itself in a desperate attempt to establish its own order, while reifying the hegemony of the superior scorers and keeping the pecking order in its place. We have all experienced junior high and spent time comparing our ideas, opinions and abilities with those that we perceive others to have. Our perceptions of others may not always be accurate, but research has identified various characteristics and dynamics of our comparisons. Now, as pertains to television, ceasing to compare ourselves with the characters may be more likely to lead to changing the channel rather than realignments in our social statuses.

The previous section certainly does not provide a complete overview of social comparison theory. It does, however, provide a strong set of theoretical tenets often used in subsequent research. Social comparison theory has received a good deal of research attention over the years, and researchers have applied it to various interpersonal settings (Dijkstra, et al., 2010). Two noteworthy expansions on the theory are direction (upward vs. downward

comparison), how people process comparison information (contrast vs. identification), and social comparison orientation. These theoretical expansions have specific implications with the potential to be directly transferable into the concept of parasocial comparison.

Directional Comparison

When in mental or emotional distress and we compare ourselves with people whom we perceive to be doing worse in life than ourselves, sometimes we can improve our sense of subjective well-being (Wills, 1981). This process is referred to as “downward social comparison.” On the other hand, when we compare ourselves with people whom we perceive to be doing better than ourselves, we may feel worse about our own state of affairs (Buunk, Kuyper, and Van der Zee, 2005), or possibly inspired to do better if we sense we can attain success similar to that of the target of our comparison (Lockwood & Kunda, 2000).

Buunk, et al. (2005) looked at both direction and processing when they studied social comparison among secondary students, and published some compelling findings. Respondents had a tendency toward upward social comparison and identification, meaning they tended to compare themselves with people they perceive to be better-functioning than they perceive themselves to be: a conclusion which accompanies an effect of identification, as well as a stronger affective effect from the comparison process. Buunk, et al.’s (2005) findings also supported their assumption that when people engage in upward social comparison, they have a greater tendency to focus on the self and the consequences to the self: a phenomenon that is less pronounced as a result of downward social comparison. If we apply these findings to a parasocial situation, we might argue that upward comparison with TV characters involves greater parasocial processing revolving around our conceptualization of our self, whereas downward parasocial comparison should result in less parasocial processing that specifically involves less focus on the

self. In other words, we have more affective investment in upward parasocial comparison than we do downward parasocial comparison. Gender differences were also revealed in their study: boys tended to be more egocentric and hostile in their responses to social comparison while girls were more empathetic or altruistic.

Buunk, Oldersma, & de Dreu (2001) also studied downward social comparison between intimate partners and found results that may be directly applicable to parasocial relationships as well. In a series of three experiments, they determined that downward comparison moderated discontent in relationships. An important caveat regarding these findings is that, as the authors argue, not everybody relies on social comparison as a means of achieving a sense of well-being. Many people rely on other factors to assess their own opinions and performance. If we were to apply this to the parasocial relationships we develop with television personae, we have grounds to argue that people who do have a greater propensity for social comparison will engage in a greater amount of parasocial comparison and report greater comparison with mediated personae, particularly downward comparison with characters for whom they have a mixed, uncertain, or ambiguous disposition. Therefore, the major question at hand is this: Where do the dynamics of social comparison fit in with parasocial thinking?

Contrast vs. Identification

Identification refers to sharing a perspective with another (Feilitzen & Linne, 1975). As Buunk & Ybema (1997) argue, identification in social comparison refers to thinking about the potential consequences for the target of one's social comparison in relation to one's own possible situations. When we compare ourselves with others, we may consider how the actions of others influence their own outcomes, and apply similar suppositions regarding our own behavior to how

we may fare in our own outcomes. In other words, identification with others through social comparison shapes our predictions for our own outcomes from various situations.

Social Comparison Orientation

Propensity for and extent to which social comparison occurs varies among individuals. Different motives for social comparison include evaluation of, improving, or enhancing oneself (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Social comparison processes are often “spontaneous, effortless, and unintentional” and “relatively automatic” (Gilbert, Giesler, and Morris, 1995, p. 227), and engaging in social comparison is often related to uncertainty (Festinger, 1954). Gibbons & Buunk (1999) argue that “essentially, the same factors thought to be situational inducements to social comparison are also assumed to be related dispositionally; most of these factors involve uncertainty about the self” (p. 130).

With this in mind, Gibbons & Buunk (1999) developed the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM). The INCOM was administered to Dutch and American students. Testing the scale revealed significant correlations with other personality measures: attention to social comparison information (ATSCI), negative affectivity and self-esteem, and neuroticism. It also proved generally consistent with Festinger’s (1954) original hypotheses that we tend to socially compare ourselves with others in terms of abilities and opinions.

The INCOM offers insight into the personality traits of people prone to compare themselves with others. Gibbons & Buunk (1999) consider other scales administered with the INCOM and describe a person highly prone to social comparison. Such a person “(a) is interpersonal more than introspectively oriented, being sensitive to the behavior of others, and (b) has a degree of uncertainty about the self, along with an interest in reducing this self-

uncertainty and, in so doing, improving” (p. 138). They further argue that the scale appears “to be assessing a unique and distinct trait that is manifested in a number of predictable and observable behaviors” (p. 138).

In summary, social comparison is a process we use to maintain a favorable self-regard (Hakmiller, 1966). It functions as a means of creating conformity and social cohesion, but also may create rifts between various groups as divergence in opinion or abilities convince members of one group that members of another group are somehow categorically different than their own group (Festinger, 1954). Ubiquitous media and infinite entertainment options present a landscape in which to test hypotheses regarding social comparison, which has largely gone unexplored. We know that through upward social comparison (seeing someone whom we perceive to be ‘better-off’ than ourselves) may lead to diminished self-esteem while producing negative affect, while seeing someone “worse-off” than ourselves may boost our self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and generate positive affect (Dijkstra, et al., 2010). Social orientation is also an observable trait characterized by negative affect and neuroticism (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Before exploring social comparison in mediated worlds and environments, it is first necessary to review our knowledge of "parasociability," a term coined by Madison & Porter (2011).

Parasocial Interactions, Relationships, Breakups, Processing, and Contact

This section reviews the literature on distinct parasocial phenomena. Though the literature is often inconsistent in its definitions (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008), parasocial interactions tend to refer to thoughts or behaviors by a viewer that transpire during a viewing experience (Auter, 1992; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Schramm & Wirth, 2010) and have often been studied within the context of interpersonal variables such as loneliness (Rubin, et. all, 1985, Wang, Fink, and Cai, 2008). Parasocial relationships, in the

literature, generally refer to relationships we build with mediated personae (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2004; Cole & Leets, 1999; Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, B. (2008), and may influence future programming selections (Gleich, 1997; Levy, 1979; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008; Schramm & Wirth, 2010). When shows are cancelled we lose parasocial contact with our favorite personae and may experience parasocial breakup distress (Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Cohen, 2003; Cohen, 2004). More recent studies identify the phenomenon of parasocial processing, which, Schramm & Hartmann (2008) tell us, “may simply be seen as a process of person perception that [sic] sets in as soon as a user encounters a persona” (p. 387). Finally, the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis, as explored by Schiappa, et al. (2005), indicates that by viewing positive portrayals of marginalized or underrepresented groups, our parasocial experiences increase our tolerance for these groups.

Parasocial Interactions

Horton & Wohl (1956) were the first to describe parasocial interaction as audience responses to one-sided communication delivered by mediated personae. Actors and audiences both fulfill roles and one-sided relationships with actors come from building a bond of intimacy. The mass media give viewers and radio listeners the illusion of face-to-face communication with the performers, and termed this “seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a para-social relationship” (p. 215). They used the term “persona” to describe a performer; with the help of other cast and crew a persona works within various technical devices to make a regular and continuing connection with the audience. When the performer successfully duplicates the gestures and conversational style their character would use in a social situation to create the illusion of intimacy, he or she makes a connection with the audience. Horton & Wohl (1956) also discussed breaking through the fourth wall, a term commonly used among people

involved in theatrical and television productions, but treat the concept not as a gimmick, but as a general goal.

Horton & Wohl (1956) further argue that producers use numerous devices to cultivate audience attitudes, such as face-to-face interactions between the studio audience and a persona; professional assistants, guests, and technicians sometimes acting as subordinates to the star, and reading pieces of fan mail. Within the context of this complex set of relationships among the televised personae, audiences are coached through a type of “showbiz propaganda” to support the actors and the show in whatever way the producers desire. Horton & Wohl (1956) also suggest that viewers get to play roles through parasocial interaction that they are not normally able to play in real-life. In fact, for most people, “the parasocial is complementary to normal social life ... it provides a social milieu in which the everyday assumptions and understandings of primary group sociability are demonstrated and reaffirmed” (p. 223).

As parasocial research developed, one of the first tasks researchers tackled was finding ways to measure the phenomenon. Rubin, Perse, & Powell (1985) contributed a seminal article to parasocial research that was one of the first to suggest that people do not turn to PSI to fulfill needs that go unmet in real-life. More importantly, the researchers concocted the Parasocial Interaction Scale, derivatives of which are still in use today by many researchers (e.g. Madison & Porter, 2012). The authors tested their hypothesis that “when interpersonal possibilities for such interaction are limited, the individual turns to the mass media for the satisfaction of this need, and, hence, may develop parasocial relationships with media personae” (p. 157). This assumption, the authors argue, comes from a sociological perspective rather than a psychological perspective. They conceptualize loneliness as “a discrepancy between the amount of interaction individuals need and the amount that they perceive is fulfilled” (p. 158). They hypothesized that

“loneliness and interpersonal communication channel use will be related negatively” and “loneliness and television reliance will be positively related” (p. 159). Among the college students whom the authors surveyed, neither of these hypotheses were supported. Their data indicated that loneliness was not related to PSI and that PSI did not appear to be a substitute for functional interpersonal alternatives to loneliness. These findings generated what is now a commonly-held assumption among parasocial researchers; rather than serving a compensatory function, parasociability is better-described as a one-sided engagement with mediated personae analogous to our sociability regarding engagement with our interpersonal relationships.

Rubin, Perse, & Powell (1985) acknowledge that TV use has many dimensions. One is for news seeking, what the authors call “instrumental use,” and PSI is a part of this type of use. Another use is ritualized time consumption. The lack of findings regarding loneliness and PSI and the scale they devised to measure PSI have been the lasting contributions of the article. Many researchers, however, continue to look for loneliness as a determinant of parasocial interaction in light of these findings.

According to Rubin & Perse (1990), loneliness is a perceived lack of interaction or quality of interaction. It is dynamic; as it persists, a person may become passive and apathetic and stop trying to cope with it through constructive means. Research suggests that when people can’t or don’t ward off loneliness by interacting with other people or other means, they turn to media. People may also turn to media if they have negative social experiences. One study even factored TV watching in with other loneliness-coping behaviors such as crying, taking pills, drinking, overeating, and doing nothing (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). The lit review also suggests that people who are chronically lonely tend to engage in less purposive TV viewing (as far as compensation for social interaction and mood management gratifications).

Rubin & Perse (1990) hypothesized that the chronically lonely would participate less in interpersonal communication and social activities and make more use of media channels. Chronically lonely people would also have higher levels of passive news and soap opera watching motives, lower levels of news and soap opera affinity and perceived realism, and lower levels of activity before, during, and after exposure to news and soap operas. Their samples are problematic; in testing hypotheses regarding news, they used nontraditional students, but for the tests involving soap operas they used undergrads. We could argue that if these people are in school, they may not be as chronically lonely as people who are not.

They tested the hypotheses using discriminant analysis. Among news viewers, they found that the chronically lonely are classified by reduced use of interpersonal communication channels and, for some reason, use of radio. The chronically lonely are also more prone to use the news as a means of passing time and have a much lower sense that the local news is real than do the non-lonely. The authors don't report this, but it also appears that the chronically lonely have stronger intentions to watch the news than the non-lonely.

The authors then did a similar test on undergraduate soap opera viewers. Chronic loneliness was again characterized by less interpersonal contact and increased use of movies and TV. It was also characterized by greater pass time motivation, reduced exciting entertainment and social utility viewing motivation, and perception that the soap opera was realistic.

In summary, chronically lonely people turn to TV (and movies to some extent) rather than interpersonal communication. They develop a passive orientation and watch just to pass the time. "Our findings," they argue, emphasize that not all media use is goal-directed and not all audience predispositions lead to active media use" (p. 49). Moreover, media use may stimulate conversation, but become a substitute for interaction in the absence of social support.

Wang, Fink, and Cai (2008) looked at different types of loneliness and how different genders respond to loneliness through media use (PSI) differently. They suggested loneliness is multifaceted, and by measuring it unidimensionally, it may be correlated with other things but not the one thing people expect it to correlate with: PSI.

Two approaches have been used to define loneliness. The attachment-cognitive approach suggests loneliness results from “a person’s feeling a lack of strong, intimate bonds with significant others. Ruptured bonds, as opposed to secure bonds, cause loneliness, as well as changes in social roles. Emotional loneliness refers the results of a lack of intimacy; *social loneliness* refers to “a perceived deficiency in social networks, or a lack of general relations or social activities” (p. 89). Other categories of loneliness have also been explored, but they all tend to fall under the attachment-cognitive approach. The other approach is the temporal approach. Chronic loneliness results from “failure to establish satisfactory social relationships over years,” situational loneliness is “caused by unexpected negative events,” which may be traumatic, and transient loneliness is momentary and occasionally experienced, perhaps after leaving the company of friends. Three categories can also capture emotional and social loneliness: family loneliness, romantic loneliness, and social loneliness.

Despite the fact that parasocial researchers have tried and failed to find a link between PSI and loneliness, Wang, et al. (2008) suggested that the problem is within the previously-used definitions of loneliness that neglected its multidimensionality and typology. Some types of loneliness have greater duration than others. They used the following measures: Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale (measures family, romantic, and social loneliness), chronic loneliness, situational loneliness, transient loneliness, and PSI (as a dependent variable). They hypothesized and found the following: There were positive relationships between romantic,

social, and family loneliness and chronic loneliness, negative events involving broken intimate bonds predicted greater emotional loneliness, whereas a negative event involving a status change predicts greater social loneliness. They found no support for relationships between transient loneliness and family, romantic, social, chronic, and situational loneliness, not support for family loneliness predicting PSI.

The authors summarize, “parasocial interaction is not a functional alternative for romance for either gender” (p. 103). Also, men turn away from mediated communication and may actually go looking for a sex partner rather than have a PSI with someone on TV. However, women tend to establish PSRs when they are in need of family relations.

Breaking through the fourth wall refers to a persona addressing the audience directly. Camera angles that decrease space (close-ups) have a tendency to also induce PSI through creating a sense of intimacy (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Auter (1992) was the first to test how breaking the fourth wall may lead to PSIs. His study also assessed the construct validity of Rubin, Perse, & Powell’s (1985) PSI scale. The author defined PSI as “one-sided interpersonal involvement of the media user with the program’s characters” (p. 174) and altered message structural components to either maintain or break down the fourth wall between the persona and the audience.

Auter (1992) used a 2X2 experimental design in which participants were asked to choose between two television shows. One segment was 17 minutes long and had no personae breaking the fourth wall. The other show was 23 minutes long and had approximately six minutes of the main persona breaking the fourth wall. Results showed that the Rubin et al. (1985) scale had good construct validity and worked well as a measure of PSI.

Tian & Hoffner (2010) explored parasocial interaction with different types of television characters from the series *Lost*. They noted that identification is an important theme in studying PSI/PSR. They suggested two types of identification: one is identification with a character while viewing and the other is wishful identification, or wanting to be more like the character. “During the identification process, audience members put themselves in the place of a character and vicariously participate in the character’s experience” (p. 252). Identification is temporary, and may vary in intensity while one is viewing the program (Cohen, 2006).

The authors surveyed people they solicited through *Lost* message boards and ABC.com, measuring perceived similarity, identification, parasocial interaction, change/influence (basically how much people try to become like characters), and affinity (how much they like the show). Tian & Hoffner (2010) found the following regarding *Lost* characters: First, perceived similarity and identification were positive predictors of parasocial interaction. These findings have particular relevance to the studies presented in this dissertation (See *Chapter 6: Experiment on Tolerance of Polygamy*). They also found that identification was a positive predictor of parasocial interaction (but this relationship is covered elsewhere in this dissertation: Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Second, perceived similarity and parasocial interaction were found to be a positive predictor of efforts to become more like a media figure. Third, using multivariate analysis of variance, they found that character type (liked, disliked, and neutral) partially predicted perceived similarity, identification, and change/influence. Liked and neutral characters did not differ significantly from each other, but both significantly differed from the disliked character. Moreover, parasocial interaction was fully predicted by liking a character.

In general Tian & Hoffner’s (2008) findings have great intuitive appeal. Perceived similarity played a role in the processes of identifying with a media character during viewing as

well as developing a parasocial bond. Identification during viewing also is associated with a stronger parasocial bond. People perceive less similarity with disliked characters. PSI and identification are reduced when people are forced to watch characters they don't like. People also have no problem becoming more like characters that they like, and socio-cognitive theory explains this modeling phenomenon. Long term PSR has a stronger influence on viewers' attitudes and behavior than identification while viewing.

Parasocial Relationships and Breakups

Parasocial relationships (PSRs) refer to relationships with mediated personae that last beyond the viewing experiences. Researchers (i.e. Cohen, 2003; Cohen; 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Rubin & McHugh, 1987) have studied PSRs within many contexts, including "parasocial breakups" or those situations in which a show is cancelled and a person loses mediated contact with a character.

Rubin & McHugh (1987) used uncertainty reduction theory (URT) and uses and gratifications theory to describe the formation of parasocial relationships. As people watch a character over time, they develop a relationship, get to know the character (therefore reducing uncertainty) and become loyal. The major components of the process of uncertainty reduction are communication, liking, and intimacy. "Amount of television exposure (communication) leads to increased attraction (liking of) a media character; parasocial interaction results from both exposure and attraction. In interpersonal and mediated contexts, this process is thought to result in increased relationship importance" (p. 281). Using these notions, the authors devised a simple model comparing interpersonal and parasocial dynamics and hypothesized that: Television exposure would be related positively to parasocial interaction with and degree of attraction to the televised character.

Different types of attraction (social, physical, and task attraction), they suggested, would be related positively to parasocial interaction and perceived importance of a relationship with a personae, with PSI also positively related to the importance of a relationship with the persona. To test these hypotheses, the authors surveyed undergrads and measured PSI, TV exposure, attraction (social, physical, and task), and the importance of the relationship with the persona. TV exposure was slightly correlated with PSI, but uncorrelated with the attraction dimensions. PSI was correlated with all dimensions of attraction. Attraction was uncorrelated with importance of relationship. PSI was highly ($r = .52$) correlated with importance of relationship.

In general, they found that PSR and real-life relationships follow a similar path of formation, and attractiveness of the person or persona plays a major mediating role in the formation. Physical attraction was less important than social and task attraction. This explains Admiral Adama and Dr. House. What goes against the interpersonal literature is that there was no connection between exposure and attraction. The authors explain that their sample was beyond the first impression stage (they had PSRs for at least 3 years with their favorite personae), the measure of exposure may have been inadequate (some personae may have been known from other shows previously), and “amount of communication may not figure into parasocial relationships because the mediated context may be controlled, ritualized, and predictable” (p. 289). Perhaps most importantly, the PSI scale “emerges as a more comprehensive instrument in that it taps both perceived importance and attraction to television characters” (p. 290).

Several studies (Cohen, 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999) have shown that adult attachment style models also apply to PSRs and that the intensity of such relationships can be predicted by those styles. Cohen (2004) designed his study specifically “to establish whether television

viewers with different attachment styles react differently to the expected loss of a favorite TV character” (p. 188). Previous work on attachment style, Cohen (2004) argues, suggested that early experiences with caregivers shape a child’s expectations about relationships. These expectations become models based on how one and his significant others should behave toward one another. Collins & Read (1990) identified three main elements in such models: comfort with intimacy, ability to depend on others, and ability to trust in faithfulness and love. Attachment styles are relatively stable over time, but consistent discrepancies may cause them to change. There are three main attachment styles identified in various bodies of relationship literature: secure, avoidant, and anxious. Children with a secure attachment style tend to have more trust and are willing to explore the world around them. Children with an avoidant style avoid or feign disinterest in caregivers, and children with an anxious style cling to caregivers.

Parasocial relationships have been shown to have benefits for people with low self-esteem. Derrick, et al. (2008) suggest that “‘connections’ to celebrities (i.e. parasocial relationships) can provide a safe route for people who have a difficult time with real interpersonal relationships (i.e., low self-esteem people) to view themselves more positively with very little risk of rejection” (p. 261). They argue that people have an ideal self that they wish they could be. The discrepancy in their ideal self and who they really are leads to feelings of disappointment and even depression. Interpersonal communication literature suggests that real-life interaction can help reduce these feelings and the tension associated with the discrepancy.

The researchers hypothesized that low self-esteem people should view PSR partners as similar to their ideal selves, and that this similarity to the ideal self should be related to greater empathy with and liking of the parasocial partner. If supported, they argue, they expected to find connection to a favorite celebrity should lead to reductions in self-discrepancies for low self-

esteem people ... through assimilation of the celebrity to the self. Furthermore, that effect should also be specific to PSR partners (rather than real partners). They used two experiments to test their hypotheses, and measured self-esteem, similarity of celebrity to aspects of self, empathy, and liking of the celebrity. As the treatment, participants were asked to write essays on their favorite celebrities or, if assigned to a control group, to write an essay about Regis Philbin.

In the first experiment, DeBacker, et al. (2008) found a good deal of support for their hypotheses. Participants ($N = 100$) reported greater similarities between their favorite celebrities and their ideal selves than between favorite celebrities and actual selves, and the type of celebrity was unrelated to the level of an individual's self-esteem. People with low self-esteem had greater empathy for celebrities whom they perceived to be more like their ideal selves. They further hypothesized that thinking about their favorite celebrities would lead people with low self-esteem to feel more similar to the celebrity, thereby reducing the discrepancy between actual and ideal selves. To test this hypothesis, they ran a second experiment ($N = 168$).

In this experiment, the results indeed showed that low self-esteem people thinking about their favorite celebrities felt more like their ideal selves than people with low self-esteem who had been asked to think about Regis Philbin. A third experiment revealed that people with low self-esteem felt closer to their ideal selves than when asked to think about Regis Philbin or one of their close relationships. The authors argue that these experiments demonstrate that "parasocial relationships can have self-enhancing benefits for low self-esteem people that they do not receive in real relationships" (p. 276). In other words, parasocial relationships have positive effects for people with low self-esteem. What happens when those relationships come to an end?

Adults respond to mediated personae in similar fashions in relation to significant others. Based on attachment style theory, Cohen (2004) argues that breakups (cancellations) with beloved media figures should lead to similar reactions in adults. Incorporating Cohen's (2003, 2004) groundwork, Eyal & Cohen (2006) introduced the term PSB to refer to parasocial breakup. Their main goal was to find the predictors of PSB distress. They hypothesized that the more intense the PSR the more distress viewers will report following PSB. In other words, the longer a viewer reports watching *Friends* the more distress he or she will report following the end of the show. The more committed viewers report themselves to be watching *Friends* and the more a viewer holds positive attitudes toward the show, the more distress he or she will report following the end of the show. The more a viewer reports his or her favorite *Friends* character is perceived as being his or her overall favorite television character and 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 the authors surveyed college students about 10 days after *Friends* ended. A few gender differences emerged: men reported significantly less PSR with their favorite *Friends* character and women reported less loneliness than men. The authors accidentally found that loneliness was related to PSB even when controlling for PSR – lonely viewers were more distressed at the breakup. In general, however, they found low levels of PSB distress and that people aren't as distressed by TV breakups as they would be by real breakups. They suggest that people are less dependent on PSRs, find them enjoyable, and know (sometimes sharing the experience with others) when a breakup is about to occur, which mitigates distress.

PSRs were originally thought of as a means of compensating for the lack of real relationship partners. However, loneliness appears to be unrelated to PSRs (Rubin, et al., 1985)

and more recent research began comparing PSRs to other types of social relationships. Highly sociable people are more likely to have PSRs than unsociable people. As Cohen (2004) argues, “those who have difficulties with social relationships because they lack either the ability to relate to the feelings of others or are extremely shy also have trouble developing relationships with television characters” (p. 192). Cohen (2004) found that PSI and expected breakup distress were correlated ($r = .58$), anxious attachment style leads to more distress over breakup, and secure and avoidant styles lead to less distress. Based on this, he argues that PSRs are indeed more similar to real-life relationships, rather than some means of compensation for a lack of social contact.

Parasocial Processing

Previous literature produced a variety of scales claiming to measure PSI but really tapped aspects of PSR such as affinity for a persona. In the early 2000s, researchers in Germany devised the Parasocial Process Scales (Hartman & Schramm, 2008). Whereas the Rubin, Perse, & Powell (1985) scale claimed to measure parasocial interaction (but whose items appear to measure parasocial phenomena with news anchors in general), the parasocial process scales measure parasocial interaction along cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains.

Schramm and Hartmann (2008) tell us, “In a nutshell, PSI as parasocial processing is about users’ cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to depicted media characters. It can be understood as a type of personal involvement ... the process may change dynamically within the course of media exposure” (p. 388). The authors devised a cognitive, affective, and behavioral response model to assess that personal involvement with personae. Their goal was to develop a scale that measured PSI regardless the liking or disliking of the persona, as well as different kinds of TV personae in different genres of fare. Each of the three response types have intrapersonal processes associated with them and include items that try to tap those processes.

Table 2.1:
Measurement of Parasocial Processing*

Cognitive

- 1) Attention allocation
- 2) Comprehension of person's action and situation
- 3) Activation of prior media and life experience
- 4) Evaluations of persona and persona's actions
- 5) Anticipatory observation
- 6) Construction of relations between persona and self

Affective

- 1) Sympathy/antipathy
- 2) Empathy/counter empathy
- 3) Emotion contagion

Behavioral

- 1) Nonverbal behavior (e.g. mimics, gestures)
 - 2) (Para)verbal behavior
 - 3) Behavioral intentions
-

*Taken from Schramm, H. & Hartmann, T. (2008). The PSI-process scales: A new measure to assess the intensity and breadth of parasocial processes. *Communications: The European Journal of Research* 33, 385-401.

Original PSI scales treated PSI as a gratification users sought through media; as a result, the items that came from earlier studies “tend to assess a positive interpersonal experience, but not a general parasocial processing” (p. 390), reflecting gratification from media use. Rubin, et al.'s (1985) scale expanded gratification scales and assessed identification, interaction, and long-term involvement with personae (newscasters specifically). The authors note that Auter and Palmgreen's (2000) Audience-Persona Interaction scale works well for assessing PSR with people's favorite character, but doesn't do too well with less-liked or even non-fictional characters. The breadth of the process scales gives them the distinct advantage over previous parasocial scales in that they are more accommodating of different types of personae.

In developing the PSI Process Scales, Hartmann & Schramm (2008) e-solicited participants, asked them to watch a TV show of a certain genre (positive or negative valence), and subsequently sent participants a reminder e-mail to fill out a survey. The respondents were then asked to name the most memorable persona and answer questions about them. It turns out the subjects picked people with whom they had positive PSI, even if they didn't like the show's genre. After thorough analysis Hartmann & Schramm (2008) demonstrated the scales to be valid measures of PSI processing. Moreover, the parasocial process scales can be applied directly after viewing.

Schramm & Wirth (2010) further differentiated PSIs from PSRs; PSIs are restricted to the duration of media exposure while PSRs may continue beyond exposure. PSRs influence future media selections and subsequent PSIs. They explore several different scales for measuring PSR/PSIs (e.g. Auter & Palmgreen, 2000 [audience-persona interaction scale]; Cohen, 2003 [parasocial breakup] Gleich, 1997).

The researchers performed three different studies to measure various determinants of PSI. The first found that attractiveness of personae works on emotional/affective PSI dimensions rather than cognitive dimensions. This study was limited in that it looked at audiences attending a Shakespearean theater production, which is different from watching it on TV. Also, it appears the audiences were Germans, limiting the generalizability across cultures.

The second looked at media user characteristics. Of interest was the finding that media user sociability strongly affects the intensity of cognitive PSIs, followed by perception of one's own attractiveness. In other words, good looking sociable people with low self-confidence are more prone to cognitive PSIs, with a similar pattern for behavioral PSIs. Moreover, a persona's good looks explain a lot (36%) of affective PSIs.

The third study looked at persona and viewer characteristics and their impacts on PSIs. The attractiveness of the persona's character had strong impacts on all three types of PSIs: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The less attractive personae are in their roles the greater the audience PSIs. In other words, people like to see failure. Interestingly, behavioral PSI was correlated with genre preference.

Finally, the authors make several important conclusions regarding PSIs. They suggest that a "socially spirited, empathetic, and open-minded personality of media users seems to boost and intensify parasocial processes" (p. 34). They also argue that parasocial and real-life interaction are "two sides of the same coin" because both require the same social skills. Their results confirm the work developed by Schramm & Hartmann (2008) for measuring parasocial processing of various personae across different media.

Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

An important development in the parasocial research that extends parasocial thinking beyond individual experiences to the experiences of entire audiences is Schiappa, et al.'s (2005) Parasocial Contact Hypothesis. This hypothesis derives from research regarding inter-group relationships. Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis tells us that prejudice of one group toward other groups decreases with increased contact with the other groups. Schiappa, et al.'s (2005) Parasocial Contact Hypothesis extends the contact hypothesis to media effects and suggests that the same mechanism of prejudice reduction can be induced through mediated means and lead to greater tolerance of groups whom we perceive to be different from our own. "Prejudicial attitudes toward a category of people, such as "Arabs," or "gay men," may be based on negative experience, a mass mediated stereotype, or socialization from family, friends, or other sources" (p. 93). Positive contact with members of an outgroup may lead to cognitive dissonance, should

preconceived notions and expectations of behavior go unfulfilled (*see* Festinger, 1957; Leippe & Eisenstadt, 1994), but that very dissonance may also lead to attitude change.

Greater, more meaningful positive contact has a direct impact on attitudes toward an outgroup and will be more likely to lead to attitude changes. The authors explain that the “reduction of prejudice through intergroup contact is best explained as the *reconceptualization of group categories*” (p. 93), which, if one will recall from the sections on social comparison, suggests a change in existing divergent attitudes. As one learns more about a different category of people, prejudice can be reduced (Allport, 1954). The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis offers that PSI with mediated characters who are categorically different from us will lead us to be more accepting of people who are different from us when we meet them in real-life.

To answer questions about parasocial contact reducing prejudice, Schiappa, et al. (2005) conducted three experiments involving the portrayals of homosexuals in popular television programs. All three studies looked at attitudes toward gay men or transvestites after exposing participants to television shows featuring such personae. The authors sought to answer the questions of whether parasocial contact by majority group members with minority group members led to a decrease in prejudice, and if the effects of parasocial contact were moderated by previous interpersonal contact with minority group members.

In the first study, Schiappa et al. (2005) hypothesized that exposure would:

... result in discriminating judgments among central characters in terms of perceived homophily, uncertainty reduction, and social, task, and physical attraction; such exposure will result in judgments of individual minority group characters that are not consistently lower than judgments of individual majority group characters. (P. 99)

Furthermore, the authors predicted exposure to positive portrayals of minority group members would lead to a decrease in prejudicial attitudes. Level of prejudice, they hypothesized, would be negatively related to “one or more measures of positive parasocial response (i.e. levels of

uncertainty reduction, perceived homophily, social, physical, and task attraction) to minority group characters” (p. 100). Finally, Schiappa, et al. (2005) hypothesized, “the more minority group acquaintances that majority group members report, the weaker the predicted association would be between positive parasocial responses with minority group members and lower levels of prejudice” (p. 100). In essence, this hypothesis suggests that having gay friends will lead to a weaker association between parasocial contact and diminished prejudice.

To test these hypotheses, the authors used an experiment (N = 174) with students. They measured various attitudes and beliefs before showing students 10 episodes of *Six Feet Under* over the course of a semester, and gave the students a 200-item survey afterward. They also measured uncertainty reduction, attraction (social, task, physical), perceived homophily, and Attitude Toward Gay Men (ATLG).

The first hypothesis was supported: “participants formed distinct judgments about each character in terms of the dimensions assessed” (p. 103). The researchers found significant main effects on the participants’ uncertainty reduction, social attraction, task attraction, physical attraction, and perceived homophily as results of assessing the characters in the show.

The second hypothesis had some support, but the researchers found that attitudes toward lesbians are not the same as attitudes toward gay men. Yet, with the male characters in *Six Feet Under*, the more positive the parasocial response, the lower the prejudice. Interestingly, Schiappa, et al. (2005) found no support for their third hypothesis, which suggested the number of homosexual contacts in real-life would moderate both parasocial contact and a decrease in prejudice. There were no significant differences in the correlations between the two and between the students with high numbers of gay friends and the students with fewer gay friends.

In the second study, Schiappa et al. (2005) hypothesized that “parasocial contact with minority group members will result in changes in category-attribute beliefs about the minority group as a whole” (p. 106). Furthermore, they predicted that “changes in levels of prejudice about a minority group will be associated with changes in category-attribute beliefs about a minority group” (p. 106). The authors used an experiment (N = 160) with pre-test, stimulus (3 episodes of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*), and post-test with a control group. They measured ATG and ATL, personality inventories (comprised of “trait adjectives for heterosexual men, homosexual men, and heterosexual women). These attributes were asked in both pre- and post-test surveys. The authors also measured parasocial responses about the *Fab 5* as a group (rather than as individuals) and re-tested Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 from the previous study (see study 1 write-up) with the data collected in this study.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 retests demonstrated several pieces of evidence for the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis. First, pre-test and post-test scores among treatment groups (but not control groups) indicated a decrease in prejudice resulted from watching episodes of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Social attraction, physical attraction, and perceived homophily increases were associated with actual gains in decreased prejudice, as measured on the ATG scales. However, only social attraction and physical attraction were correlated with the actual post-test scores.

In re-testing Hypothesis 3, the authors found similar results as they did in the first study. Having gay friends was associated with less change in attitudes toward gays. Not having gay friends was associated with greater attitude changes toward gays after viewing three episodes of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Both having gay friends and not having gay friends were significantly associated with attitude change.

For the fourth hypothesis the authors found support. H4 stated, “parasocial contact with minority group members will result in changes in category-attitude beliefs about the minority group as a whole” (p. 109). Results showed that treatment groups had significantly greater changes in beliefs than did the control group. H5, which predicted that changes in category-attribute beliefs about gay men would be related to changes in prejudice toward them. Results demonstrated a moderate and significant correlation between changes in attitude and changes in beliefs.

The third study presented by Schiappa, et al. (2005) used episodes of *Dress to Kill* as the stimulus, a show about a transvestite comedian. Pre-test items included the ATLG, category-attribute statements about transvestites, a measure of Attitudes Toward Transvestites (ATT, and) demographic questions. In the post-test the authors asked participants (N = 61) to answer questions that measured uncertainty reduction, attraction (social, task, physical), and perceived homophily. They retested their hypotheses from the previous studies and found support for all of them, this time within the context of mediated transvestitism. In general, all three of Schiappa, et al.’s (2005) studies provided some support for the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis.

To-date, the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis has not been explored in relation to viewing polygamist lifestyles in entertainment media, making the current study unique. In studying this topic, the results potentially have important implications for our understanding of general attitudes toward people living a polygamist lifestyle, as well as implications for theories of media effects. Our lack of research on the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis and parasocial comparison processes, as well as how the two may relate to one another, provide a compelling set of theoretical constructs for expanding our understanding of media effects.

Based on the extant literature, I have conducted three studies. These studies offer evidence to support my conclusion regarding parasocial comparison within the context of the theme of polygamy. The first study consisted of interviews conducted with students who had viewed episodes of *Big Love*, *Sister Wives*, or who had followed television coverage of the Warren Jeffs compound raid and subsequent trial. Interview questions helped explore how people compared themselves with the characters they saw on television and the affective effects of such processes. The second study was administered in an online survey to viewers of these types of shows as well as students. The third study used experimental methods to examine parasocial processing and parasocial comparison.

Before presenting the studies involved in this dissertation, I first will present the variables and hypotheses. The following chapter identifies the variables examined in this study. I then explain how I arrived at the hypotheses and offer the research questions that will be explored.

CHAPTER 3:
VARIABLES, SYNTHESIS, HYPOTHESES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Table 3.1: Variables presents the variables used in the following studies.

Table 3.1: Variables	
<u>Independent Variables</u>	
Main Character	
Social Comparison (INCOM)	
<u>Dependent Variables</u>	
Parasocial Processing Index	
1) Cognitive Outcomes	
2) Affective Outcomes	
3) Behavioral Outcomes/Intentions	
Attitudes Toward Polygamists Index (ATP)	
1) Attitudes Toward Female Polygamists (ATPW)	
2) Attitudes Toward Male Polygamists (ATPM)	
Affective Results of Parasocial Comparison (ARSC)	
1) Downward Comparison	
2) Upward Comparison	
<u>Additional Measures</u>	
Religiosity	
Religion	
Contact With Polygamists	
Demographics	

Again, as I have explained, Americans typically look down on polygamy (i.e. Embry, 1987; Nielsen, 2006; Nielsen & Cragun, 2010; Phipps, 2009). We also know that downward social comparison results in weaker affective consequences than upward comparison and that

upward comparison results in stronger identification (a cognitive process) than downward comparison (Buunk, et al., 2005). We could argue that upward comparison with TV characters involves greater parasocial processing revolving around our conceptualization of our self; whereas downward parasocial comparison should result in less parasocial processing that specifically involves less focus on the self. In other words, we have more affective investment in upward parasocial comparison than we do downward parasocial comparison. Therefore, we expect that:

H1: Downward parasocial comparison will be associated with lower levels of affective parasocial processing.

H2: Downward social comparison will be associated with lower levels of tolerance for polygamy.

H3: Upward social comparison will be associated with higher levels of cognitive processing.

H4: Upward social comparison will be associated with higher levels of tolerance for polygamy.

Tian & Hoffner (2008) found that character type predicts parasocial interaction, more specifically, that identification leads to more parasocial interaction with positive and neutral than disliked characters. Identification occurs during cognitive processing of mediated personae (Schramm & Hartmann). Per the PCH (Schiappa, et al., 2005) and Tian & Hoffner's (2008) work, I propose the following hypotheses regarding the effects of portrayals of polygamists on acceptance of polygamy as a lifestyle.

H5: People exposed to a positive portrayal of a polygamist will indicate greater acceptance of polygamy.

H6: People exposed to a negative portrayal of a polygamist will indicate less acceptance of polygamy.

H7a-c: Parasocial comparison will be predicted by higher levels of a) cognitive, b) affective, and c) behavioral parasocial processing.

Hartmann & Schramm (2008) never directly address social comparison processes in their parasocial processing model. However, we know that social comparison is a cognitive process (Festinger, 1954), often with affective results (Buunk, et al., 2005). I stop short of hypothesizing that social comparison occurs during the sub-processes identified by Hartmann & Schramm (2008) and Schramm & Wirth (2010), which include comprehension of a persona's action and situation, activation of prior media and life experience, and evaluations of a persona and the persona's actions, and offer RQs 1 and 2 instead:

RQ1: What are the affective effects of parasocial comparison within the context of polygamy shows?

RQ2: How is parasocial comparison related to parasocial processing?

I will answer the third research question by comparing surveys of viewers of polygamy shows with surveys of students. According to the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis, prolonged parasocial contact with underrepresented groups should lead to greater tolerance of polygamy. Two studies have shown that demographic variables play a role in the formation of our attitudes toward polygamists. Nielsen (2006) and Nielsen & Cragun (2010) found that education and personal contact with polygamists predicted greater levels of tolerance, while being young predicted intolerance. Religiosity is also a known predictor of intolerance; Nielsen & Cragun (2010) showed that a lack of religiosity was associated with greater tolerance. Intolerance of polygamists is also predicted by regular attendance at worship services (Nielsen, 2006). Although these studies offer us some expectations for how several demographic variables may influence attitudes toward polygamists in light of exposure to polygamy shows, I have chosen to use a broad research question in lieu of hypotheses.

RQ3: How do viewers of polygamy shows and students differ in terms of attitudes toward polygamy?

RQ4: Which items in the parasocial processing scale are most-associated with social (both upward and downward) comparison?

RQ5: How is parasocial comparison related to parasocial interaction (behavioral domain of parasocial processing)?

RQ6: Does viewing mixed portrayals of polygamists result in a change in attitudes toward polygamists?

It is likely that the gender of a viewer plays a role in attitudes toward polygamists of both genders (Bennion, 2012). These studies focus on polygyny rather than polyandry, a system whereby a male plays a dominant role in a family with more than one wife fulfilling subservient roles. I offer R7 as a means of exploring the role of gender in attitudes toward polygamists.

RQ7: How do men and women differ in their attitudes toward 1) male and 2) female polygamists?

CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEWS ON PARASOCIAL COMPARISON

Introduction

In this study I collected qualitative data through personal interviews to assess how viewers compare themselves with the characters/figures and ask why they may feel the way they do as a result of the parasocial comparisons they make. I asked the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the affective effects of parasocial comparison within the context of polygamy shows?

RQ2: How is directional parasocial comparison related to parasocial processing?

Previous studies on these topics have generally relied on quantitative methods and attempted to measure phenomena with scales. Hartmann & Schramm (2008) never directly address social comparison processes in their parasocial processing model. However, we know that social comparison is a cognitive process (Festinger, 1954), often with affective outcomes (Buunk, et al., 2005). In this study, I sought descriptions of people's attempts at comparing themselves with polygamous television characters. How does the process start? What are the outcomes? This study is significant because in it, I develop a working model of the social comparison as it relates to parasocial processing within the context of the act of viewing polygamy on television. This model helps us better-understand how people relate to mediated polygamist characters, as well as the affective results people experience from viewing them.

Procedure

The first step in this process was securing approval from the university's Institutional Review Board. All instruments used in this dissertation were approved without problems. Between June 25 and July 6, 2012, I conducted twenty-eight semi-structured interviews with people who had seen within the past three months either *Sister Wives*, *Big Love*, news coverage

of Warren Jeffs, or any of the various documentaries that explore polygamy. All participants ($N = 28$) were enrolled in mass communication courses, solicited through the Manship School's human subjects pool, and received course credit for their participation. Most of the participants identified themselves as conservative ($N = 20$) mass communication majors ($N = 26$) of Caucasian descent ($N = 22$), and females dominated the sample ($N = 21$). Females mostly identified as conservative ($N = 17$), while the males were more ideologically diverse (three conservatives, four liberals).

Lindlof & Taylor (2002) refer to these types of interviews as "respondent interviews" (as opposed to "ethnographic," "informant," "narrative," or "focus group" interviews. Lazarsfeld (1944) provides descriptions of the goals of respondent interviews:

- 1) to clarify the meanings of common concepts and opinions; 2) to distinguish the decisive elements of an expressed opinion; 3) to determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or act in a certain way; 4) to classify complex attitude patterns; and 5) to understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to act. (P. 40)

Lazarsfeld's (1944) denoted goals of respondent interviews reflected my own goals in most areas on this portion of the project. The interviews took place in a private office with the door closed to eliminate background noise from the corridor. I recorded the interviews using an iPhone audio recorder and later transcribed them. All interviewees maintained anonymity through the MEL's numbering system. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have supplied pseudonyms in place of the respondent identification numbers.

To give structure to the interviews, I devised and used an interview guide (see Appendix F), but used it very flexibly to accommodate and further explore specific situations. Lindlof & Taylor (2002) argue that using such a guide helps accommodate social dynamics during the interview while providing the advantage of being able to explore areas that may go unexplored if

the interviewer were to stick to a rigid structure. All interview questions were directly adapted from questions used by Buunk, et al. (1990) in an experiment regarding the affective results of social comparison (ARSC). The questions regarding personae deemed “worse-off” by the respondents and the subsequent answers indicated affective states associated with downward parasocial comparison while the “better-off” questions assessed the affective results of upward parasocial comparison.

In the beginning of the interview, respondents were asked to describe a specific television scene or scenario involving polygamy in which they felt they were better-off in their lives than the characters. Interviewees were also asked which characters in the shows *Sister Wives* and *Big Love* were their favorites. Asking for a description of a specific scene or event and a favorite character helped respondents start with a basis from which to answer the subsequent questions “How frequently did you feel lucky/grateful/fearful/anxious when watching characters you perceived to be WORSE OFF than yourself?” and “How frequently did you feel frustrated/depressed/inspired/comforted when watching characters you perceived to be BETTER-OFF than yourself?” After each of the eight questions, respondents were asked to elaborate on why they felt as they did.

Interviews were conducted well beyond the point of redundancy in answers. As I received redundant answers, I made sure to take notes and mark them for ease of retrieval after the run of interviews. Before presenting the results, the following section explains the analytical process. Though the process was flexible, it was largely phenomenological due to the approach’s compatibility with cognitive psychology.

Coding

Lindlof & Taylor (2002) argue that qualitative researchers, when faced with large volumes of data, must begin to code and categorize it. Such a process “keeps the growth of data under control and keeps the analyst alert to the conceptual trajectory of the study” (p. 214). About half the coding took place during the interview process (usually immediately after the interview). For this part of the coding I printed out interview question sheets attached to consent forms. During the interviews I often made notes on the question sheets regarding social comparison and parasocial processes. Such notes cued me in to listen in greater detail when later transcribing the interviews. It was during this part of the process that categories begin to emerge, and at which point I began to see redundancies in the responses.

Additional coding and refinement of the categorical themes took place during the transcription process, and I added thoughts and sometimes direct quotes at the bottom of the transcriptions in footnote form. After transcribing the interviews, I printed them out and placed them in a notebook with the original notes taken during the interviews. This became my codebook.

Over a period of nine months, I returned to the codebook frequently, re-reading interviews, making notes, adding characteristics I remembered regarding the respondents, and the like. As I went through this process, I also applied sticky tabs to the pages with content that I sought to further extricate in this dissertation. Green tabs represented social comparison while blue tabs represented parasocial interaction and processing. The codebook continued to serve as my interface with the data collected during this study.

Analysis

Artist James Elkins (1996) looks at subjective experience and describes it in terms of cognition and affect. His work falls in with existential phenomenology, as the materiality of his interpretation is highly subjective. He argues that he does not focus on anything that is not connected with his own desires and actions. In “just looking,” he is hunting; he has his eye out for something, but he is fully aware there are cognitive and affective processes shaping what he sees and how he sees it. “Looking immediately activates desire, possession, violence, displeasure, pain, force, ambition, power, obligation, gratitude, longing ... there seems to be no end to what seeing is, to how it is tangled with living and acting. But there is no such thing as just looking” (p. 31).

An important concept Elkins offers is the idea of an object staring back at the viewer. This should not (always) be taken literally; rather it suggests a cognitive process of self-perception gleaned through the act of looking at an object. He cites as an example a box sitting in the corner of his office. He never reveals what is in the box, only telling the reader that it was a gift and that it reminds him of certain things about himself, as it is associated with memories from a previous time. Whenever he sees the box, it works like a little mirror, returning to him a small part of his image of himself. “I see myself being seen – again, without the thought ever crossing my mind – and I turn away, or I put some object between my eyes and the box” (p. 72).

In this sense, the act of looking at an object is more akin to looking at a mirror and seeing our own desires, drives, ideas, and memories reflected back at us. Elkins (1996) disrupts a simple one-way subject-object relationship and suggests that vision occurs somewhere between the subject and object. Elkins focuses on the subjective experience of seeing (and being “seen”) and isn’t concerned with universal meaning of symbols.

Elkins' (1996) approach to experiencing various spectacles (in his case, works of art) shaped my approach to analysis of phenomena in this study for several reasons. First, like Elkins (1996), I began with the assumption that respondents are seeing something within themselves when they view polygamous characters. It may be something completely different from what they see on the screen, in which case the experience may elicit a sense of divergence (i.e. arguing among the *Sister Wives* personae) or they may see something similar enough to themselves that they appreciate -- something that may even elicit desires (i.e. to have a large family or a successful career). Understanding how "the object stares back" reveals a great deal of how respondents process images and how that processing of images shapes subsequent affective states. Finally, the difference in Elkins' (1996) means of analysis often differs from parasocial processing and parasocial comparison only in terms of the language used. We might ultimately say cognitive psychology is phenomenology, only with different terms and measurements, but pursuing such an argument falls beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Findings

The following section details the themes uncovered in the course of research. I first present two minor themes of interest: "Flipping channels" and "top-of-mind awareness." I then present four themes of greater salience. "Parasocial interaction," "empathy and sympathy," "polygamy as a lifestyle choice," and "divergence" emerged as the dominant themes. In this section I will present the themes and define them by offering supporting evidence and quotes taken from the interviews that identify and/or flesh out those themes.

Flipping Channels/The Freak Factor

The majority of respondents indicated that they had recently watched *Sister Wives* (as opposed to *Big Love*, news coverage of the YFZ events, or other polygamy documentaries), and

that it was not one of their favorite shows. The theme here is that respondents tended to only watch it when “nothing else was on” or when they were flipping through channels. The main reason given by respondents for stopping at *Sister Wives* during their searches for entertainment was a curiosity of how people live and manage a polygamist lifestyle. Most reported that the novelty of polygamy was the only reason they felt attracted to the show.

“I just flipped through once and thought that was crazy,” Iris offered, “I wanted to see how people really do that and who does that [practice polygamy] ... what kind of people are on that kind of show. They seemed like -- they all looked normal and they all seemed normal ...” Carol, in reference to *Sister Wives*, told me, “It kind of interested me more in polygamy. I would definitely keep watching *Sister Wives*, even though it’s not something I would want for my family or anything ... It was entertaining because it’s just so different from anything I’ve watched; it’s something new.” Otto, a liberal and African-American mass communication student, also described his interest in *Sister Wives* in terms of novelty.

I don’t think it’s an inspiring thing, just because it’s not something I’m used to. Polygamy isn’t something I see every day so I’m not inspired by someone who’s a polygamist ... he’s [Kody from *Sister Wives*] really different so I don’t connect with him on that level -- it’s more like I’m looking from afar and think ‘oh that’s kind of cool’ but I don’t feel like I’m like him in any way.

Walter, a liberal mass communication graduate student, made a similar comment regarding *Big Love*. “It’s like watching the prelude to a train wreck. Because you kind of knew that he wasn’t going to keep it all together ... you can only keep the cat in the bag for so long. It was interesting how they react to new problems and new situations every week.” Walter added some additional comments regarding the gratifications of watching *Big Love*.

I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to live in a big house ... nice standing in the community and three hot wives. Having said that, not really ... I kind of view the show as escapist fantasy ... I think everyone does. The subject of polygamy is so taboo that you kind of look into it thinking "Oh that's what that kind of life is like" -- I want to see more of what this kind of life is like ... considering I grew up on the East Coast, I've never seen anything like this.

Despite a seemingly superficial interest in polygamy, viewing such shows led to additional awareness of polygamy in the media for some of the respondents. The following section offers some evidence of this.

Top-of-Mind Awareness

A few respondents indicated that watching *Sister Wives* and *Big Love* brought polygamy to their attention in a manner that led to subsequent reading on the topic. Howard, for example, detailed a process by which watching *Big Love* raised his awareness of polygamy, and he paid more attention to the topic when seeing news coverage of Warren Jeffs in *Rolling Stone* magazine and other media. He also described a band of which he was a fan, whose lead singer had grown up in a polygamous household. "Honestly," he admitted, "I wouldn't say I went looking for those [news articles] -- I came across them and might not have read them if I hadn't been interested in it already."

Parasocial Interaction

All respondents indicated some degree of parasocial processing in response to (or as a predictor of) viewing the show. Respondents frequently alternated pronoun usage between first, second, and third person, often using second person from the perspective of someone actually interacting with the characters. Through such pronoun usage, the participants often oriented themselves within the cast of characters to explain their opinions on various topics the characters faced. One respondent noted that his mother called him weekly to give him updates on the characters as if they were real-life acquaintances of the family.

Several examples of affective results of cognitive processing emerged. Respondents tended to reshape the question (anxiety/worse-off) and suggest they felt some anxiety for the personae or the potential consequences of the various situations in which the personae found themselves. Overall the responses to the question of feeling anxiety from viewing characters they deemed worse-off than themselves were quite varied, and tended to be personae- or event-centric. “They have a twist that makes me look forward to next season and makes me anxious in that aspect ...” Ubaldo, a conservative mass communication student told me. Brian mentioned, “Not exceptionally often, but there were a few scenes here and there.” In contrast Howard stated, “Definitely because I remember ... it seemed ... that there were always issues between somebody.” Finally, Theresa, a conservative mass communications student who identified herself as Catholic suggested “I guess anxiety would describe ... how it’s difficult to watch them. I would just feel it while watching the show, it would honestly go away after I stopped watching it ... it wasn’t like a problem I continually thought about after the show.”

The social divergence of polygamist characters often diminished any feelings of depression that respondents experienced through upward parasocial comparison. Brian’s elaboration on the question points to a shutdown of social comparison during the cognitive steps in parasocial processing.

Sometimes, typically shows with characters who sort of resemble my own situation I guess. Like I said, it’s different spheres; when the spheres are more comparable and more similar to each other, I’m like, ‘well I’m in a similar situation, why can’t I?’ I’m typically not very sad though. I don’t really get that way with reality shows, but I do kind of agree ... I actually question the reality of it...

Most respondents, however, did not indicate feeling depressed by upward social comparison with the characters. “Not really. I’m only 20 years old and can’t support myself” Larry confided. “No, as far as *Sister Wives* goes, that’s not the kind of life I’d like to lead”

Katherine claimed. “I feel sad for them, but they did choose it,” Debbie told me. “Probably never. I don’t get depressed,” Raphaela, a conservative mass communication student, told me.

Two additional reasons people felt polygamist characters were better-off than themselves revolved around having a large, dependable family and finances, and a few admitted feeling depressed about their own families and finances. Otto described his desire for closeness with other human beings: “I feel like I have never had so many close bonds, so I think I’m kind of jealous that he [Kody Brown from *Sister Wives*] has three women who unconditionally love him, and I feel he’s a little better-off in that sense.” Pearl, another conservative mass communication student indicated, “I don’t think so ... I wish I had a big family ... but I don’t think I would prefer that or that whole situation [polygamy] in general over my life ... that one aspect of their life is cool but not enough to make me jealous.”

Finally, when asked how often they felt inspired as a result of comparing themselves with the polygamist personae, responses varied. About a third of the responses suggested feelings of inspiration. Allison noted that, “actually, it pushes me. It makes me think, ‘this person has a reality TV show’ or ‘this person is very smart, determined and a successful person. If they can do it I can do it.’ That’s how I think of it. Motivation.” Selma, a conservative mass communications student offered, “Probably a lot of the time ... I think that just watching the characters who are better-off than you makes you want to achieve something like that.” “Definitely,” Howard replied. “If someone can accomplish that much through that much struggle, I think a lot of people can accomplish a lot of things, so I guess that’s inspiring.” “It makes me want a big family ... to have a bunch of kids; I would like to marry into a big family. Having a big family is important to me” Pearl said, but added the caveat, “I’ll admire their family but it’s [polygamy] not something I want to do.”

Some respondents suggested mild inspiration. Greta answered, “I guess somewhat inspired, to go out and continue to do what I do -- that’s the only way I feel somewhat inspired because they keep working to get their degrees.” “Sometimes -- it goes back to the more similar to me they are the more likely I am to be inspired by it ...” as Brian described the affective results he experienced from viewing the *Sister Wives*. Regarding inspiration, Iris told me she felt, “A little. Just that people will live their life like that, even though it’s not traditional, it’s just something they want to do, so more power to them.” Finally, Esther admitted, “I felt inspired when he [Bill Henrickson in *Big Love*] ran for senator ... he stood up for what he believed in. He didn’t let it bother him; he continued on for his senatorship.”

Others, such as Mabel, denied inspiration: “Inspired? ... I don’t think I was inspired.” Nor did Carol admit inspiration: “I don’t find it that inspiring; I’m not really inspired. I’m from a large family so I’m not necessarily inspired.”

As this theme indicates, social comparison appears to be a part of the cognitive aspect of parasocial processing. These interviews demonstrated cognitive, affective, and to some degree behavioral results (particularly regarding feelings of inspiration), despite minimal investment in the show. In the following section, we see more affective results of social comparison during parasocial processing, most of them associated with downward comparison.

Empathy and Sympathy

Many respondents indicated feeling sorry for the children portrayed in the show(s). They often compared the upbringing of polygamous children with their own upbringings and felt the children were being deprived of the “traditional” and “normal” upbringings that the respondents had experienced. This clearly demonstrated some degree of downward parasocial comparison as a result of parasocial processing.

Brian, a male student who identified himself as liberal, felt “sort of grateful that I didn’t have to assimilate; I didn’t have to go from this [polygamy] to try to assimilate to, say, a governmental public school ... That’s the biggest thing the show brought up with me. I think I was focusing more on the kids than the wives.” Carol, a female conservative who was not a mass communication major said “... I feel grateful for having I guess a traditional lifestyle...” Yet not all of the parasocial comparisons were downward. Allison, who identified herself as a female and conservative student noted “I feel like they [the kids] may have more attention -- the kids might feel more love...”

Empathy was not limited to feelings for the children of polygamous marriages. A few offered alternative emotions, usually some variant of sympathy, when asked how often they felt fearful when comparing themselves with personae deemed worse-off than themselves. Debbie, a conservative female student from outside the Manship school mentioned that she felt “Not really fearful but sad because they’re never going to get to live a normal life, and especially being on the show, their life is in the public eye and everyone is going to know who they are ...” Similarly, Esther, a liberal and female mass communication student commented: “When it happens in the news, like when I hear about Warren Jeffs ... then I get fearful or anxious, but it’s not for me; it’s more sympathy I guess.”

Finally, empathy often resulted from comparing the situations of some personae with other personae in the program through a sort of “third-person comparison.” A minority of respondents described scenarios from the shows in which one of the characters was better-off than other characters, and they felt frustrated *for* (rather than *by*) the characters who were worse off. This finding indicates parasocial interaction and parasocial comparison in the form of

empathy. Debbie succinctly described her empathy for the *Sister Wives*: “I feel frustrated for *them*, not for *him* [Kody Brown].”

Polygamy As a Lifestyle Choice

Many interviewees indicated that they looked at polygamy as a lifestyle choice, and one they would never choose for themselves. Some admitted to admiring the *Sister Wives* family for sticking with its principles in the face of adversity. The main theme that emerged here is that the respondents would not want to have to deal with living in a household with so many people, but they generally respected it as a lifestyle choice among others. As Fiona, a conservative female mass communications major noted, “I think it’s their choice, I don’t have a problem with it. It just wouldn’t be my choice of lifestyle.”

The first affective result (or lack thereof) associated with lifestyle choices was “lucky.” In general, “Lucky” was not an accurate term for describing the affective results of their viewing experiences. Theresa noted “I don’t think I ever felt lucky; I never really thought about how lucky I was to not be them. I focused more on how bad it is to be them ...” Others described specific scenarios that led them to feel lucky to not be involved with polygamy or its consequences. Greta, a female and conservative mass communication student responded, “I felt lucky that I didn’t have to be forced out of my own home because of a lifestyle choice.”¹ According to Fiona, “I think it’s their choice, I don’t have a problem with it. It just wouldn’t be my choice of lifestyle.”

When asked if watching polygamist personae caused them to feel anxious about their own lives, most respondents reported that it did not. Only one respondent, Debbie, indicated any

¹ In Season 2 of *Sister Wives*, the Brown family felt compelled by social pressures and local authorities to leave Salt Lake City, later settling in Las Vegas, Nevada (Takahashi, 16-Oct., 2012).

anxiety in her own life when comparing the personae with themselves, and it too was related to polygamy as a lifestyle choice.

I feel anxious because -- is this really happening? Could this be a new way of life? Because if it's on TV it means we like to watch it. So, these guys could get this idea that 'oh, well I could have multiple wives, and that's, like, no. ... It wouldn't be on the air so long if people weren't intrigued by it. [Do you think it could have an effect on people?] I hope not ... when I watch it I get nervous. it's so intriguing but I hope people look at it and aren't happy about it, that they're more like, 'This is weird' and intrigued in it for the reasons I am, to be happy in their life, not to change their life to be like them.

Many respondents associated comfort as an affective outcome with watching personae that they perceived to be better-off than themselves, and made neutral or even positive evaluations of polygamy as a lifestyle choice. Respondents generally admitted experiencing a mild sense of comfort as a result of seeing characters live unusual lives successfully. Responses suggested some degree of admiration for the personae standing up for themselves and continuing on in the face of adversity, and were often similar in character or related to their responses regarding inspiration. "With the inspiration comes comfort" Brian said. Howard, a liberal mass communication student responded, "I would say so for similar reasons for being inspired -- they obviously had stresses and they achieved some kind of success from it, so that's comforting."

Others indicated a vaguer or absent sense of comfort. Carol, for instance, noted, "I didn't feel uncomfortable, it's just that it's so different -- I've never really watched something like that ... I guess I was comforted in that they're OK with their lifestyle; they're not really unthankful or anything." "I guess it could be comforting that he [Cody from *Sister Wives*] didn't care what other people thought," Esther said. Debbie described affect shared with her mother as a result of watching *Sister Wives*: "most of the times I watch it I watch it with my mom and we laugh about it. She's always like, 'aren't you happy that this isn't your life?' and I am always like 'Shooooo!'"

On the other hand, several responses suggested that comfort did not describe how they felt when comparing themselves with the polygamous personae whom they perceived to be

better-off than themselves. Iris, a conservative female student from outside the Manship School had a lukewarm response: “No, I think they’re happy. That’s what they want and that’s what they’re getting, and that’s fine.” Fiona argued, “It’s not normal; I really don’t think it’s a normal thing. The children seem OK with it, and they look at it ... as a big family. They’re OK with it, which is comforting, because I was kind of worried what they thought of it ... it’s like their parents’ choice that influenced them.” Selma responded, “probably not a lot ... why would you feel comforted that someone’s better than you? ... Like, glad they are better-off than me? Not really.”

Divergence

Parasocial comparison often ceased due to finding the characters were so fundamentally different from the respondents that parasocial comparison was useless. Some viewers chose to change the channel at this point. Other viewers, however, continued to watch out of curiosity.

Responses indicating divergence were associated with several different affective outcomes. When asked how frequently they felt lucky, Jewell told me, “Every minute it’s on ...”, Debbie said, “Every time I watch it,” Katherine, a female conservative mass communication student replied, “Almost continuously ...” “Fairly often” Brian admitted, “The whole show,” Iris replied, and “Probably a lot; I do that not just with that show [Sister Wives] but other shows ...” Selma added.

When asked about feeling grateful as a result of viewing personae whom the respondents deemed worse-off than themselves, responses were “lukewarm” and indicated minimal affective investment, suggestive of divergence. Such responses included, “Not grateful, but thankful would be a better word for me” Greta admitted. Larry, a conservative, and one of the few male mass communication students noted, “I wouldn’t say grateful in that life could suck a lot more.”

Mabel, a conservative mass communication student suggested the persona having a choice in their own matters: “It’s her lifestyle, she can do what she wants -- but she doesn’t have to.” “I guess [I feel grateful] because I would never do that [practice polygamy] and I just think it’s different to do that” Iris argued. Some of the responses for “grateful” that indicated divergence were more elaborate than those for “lucky.” For example, Howard argued, “I’d say I felt grateful for the fact my life is a bit more simple than theirs ... my life seemed more manageable to me.”

Respondents gave a resounding “no” or “they [the characters] were all worse off” when asked how often they felt frustrated with their own lives when viewing characters whom they perceived to be better-off than themselves. “I knew they were happy within their context and it didn’t have any relation to mine, so them being happy -- it wasn’t making me sad. They are just too different” Brian argued. Katherine explained, “As far as *Sister Wives* goes, that’s not the kind of life I’d like to lead.” Reflecting her earlier comment on lifestyle as a personal choice, Mabel followed up with: “You don’t have to be in a relationship with five other people; you chose to do so ...” Naomi, a conservative mass communication student admitted to having negative feelings toward the polygamous personae in *Sister Wives*: “I was really frustrated with the show -- like ‘I can’t believe you do this!’ kind of thing ... in my head I was like ‘this is stupid’ ... I don’t believe in polygamy and I was like ‘you guys are putting yourselves in this drama and it’s your fault. Stop whining about it’.” As we shall see in the following discussion section, parasocial comparison (but not parasocial processing) often ceases when individuals or groups are seen as too divergent in opinions in comparison with the viewer.

Discussion

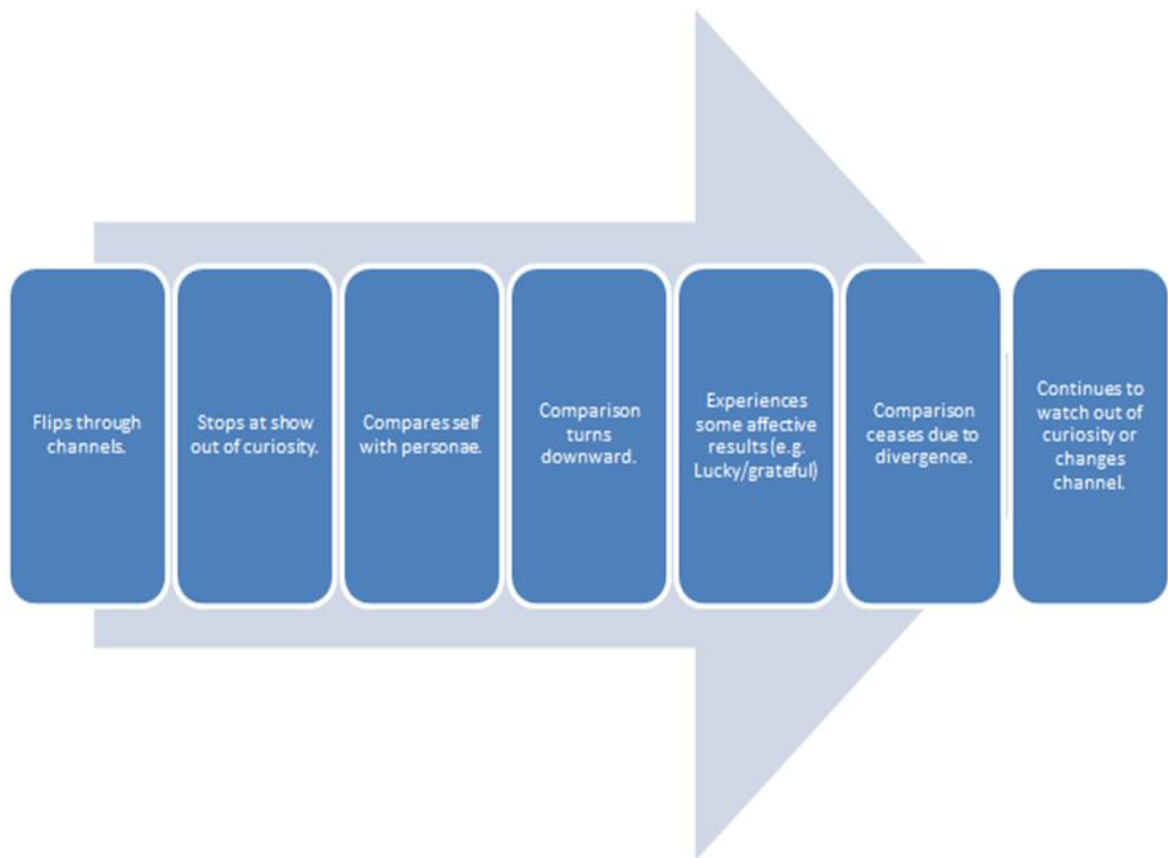
The following discussion addresses the elements and dynamics of parasocial processing and parasocial comparison within the findings and locates them within the existing literature on

PSI/PSR, particularly the parasocial processing model presented by Schramm & Wirth (2010). It is worth noting that none of the respondents admitted to being actual fans of *Sister Wives* (though three respondents were fans of *Big Love*), and had limited affective investment in the show and the characters. As mentioned in the previous findings section, the most oft-cited reason for watching *Sister Wives* was because “there was nothing else on” at the time that the respondents found interesting. Several reported they arrived at the show after surfing through channels and stopped at *Sister Wives* out of curiosity, but all reported some degree of parasocial processing of the characters.

Parasocial Processing

The following graph offers a simplified depiction of the viewing process as indicated by participants. First, the respondents engaged in a searching behavior, often flipping through channels until they arrive at *Sister Wives* out of curiosity about polygamy. Next, they observed the characters, compared their situations with their own, often deciding the characters were worse-off than themselves, and experienced affective results of comparison. As they assessed the characters to be very different from themselves, a sense of divergence emerged, and viewers either changed the channel or continued to watch out of curiosity. Graph 4.1 addresses the relationship between parasocial comparison and viewing.

The findings from the interviews support several existing notions in the parasocial literature. Specifically, there was a tendency among respondents to imagine themselves in the dramatic situations in which they viewed the characters. Several authors have noted this phenomenon (i.e. Klimmt, et al., 2006), but it is perhaps best described by Schramm & Wirth’s (2010) model of parasocial processing, which accounts for cognitive, affective, and behavioral



Graph 4.1:
The Viewing Process

processes as results of viewing a performance. In this study, respondents reported the cognitive processes of comprehending the situations and actions of the characters, evaluating the actions of the characters, and activation of prior life experiences. It is in this activation of one's prior life experiences that social comparison occurs; many respondents admitted to thinking about their own childhoods. Respondents also considered their future and resoundingly gave a "no" to the idea of polygamy as an option for pursuing their own happiness. Considering the past and the future activated affective processing and outcomes in terms of empathy, sympathy, and antipathy for the characters, with sympathy often felt for the polygamists' children. Finally, behavioral parasocial processing manifested itself as vague behavioral intentions (i.e. inspiration) and, more likely (and specifically), changing the channel.

Within the context of the questions asked in the interviews, respondents gave answers indicative of parasocial processing most often when asked to present a specific scenario in which they felt the characters were worse off than themselves and how often they felt grateful or anxious when determining the characters were worse off than themselves. These particular questions required the participants to put themselves into the positions of the characters, assess the world around them, determine the characters were worse off than themselves, and make a judgment on the larger situation. In light of this, parasocial processing was induced by, as what Schiappa, et al. (2005) refer to as a “contact” or “parasocial response;” the processing that takes place upon contact with the characters that allows audiences to better-assess the characters’ situations.

The categories “parasocial processing” and judgments regarding “lifestyle choice” were largely associated with cognitive activities. The “top of mind awareness” category also had cognitive properties, but showed some behavioral properties as well. This section focuses on the former two categories.

Though I used the term “parasocial processing” to label the category, for this particular section I refer almost exclusively to cognitive activities resulting from exposure to the characters. Respondents suggested varying degrees of identification with the characters, usually placing themselves in the roles of the children or women from *Sister Wives*. Several respondents described how they would view the *Sister Wives* world through the eyes of the characters, creating hypothetical scenarios between those characters, and negotiating how they would deal with those scenarios through a form of imagined interaction (See Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt, 2008). This phenomenon was frequently indicated by a transition into speaking with me, the

interviewer in the second person, as if the respondent were among the characters talking to me, the viewer.

Schramm & Wirth (2010) also indicate the sub-processes of activation of prior experiences (both mediated and real), evaluating the actions of personae, and constructing relations between self and a personae, as parts of cognitive processing of mediated figures. This study makes salient the notion of parasocial comparison, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, as a significant component among the processes of parasocial processing. Referring to previous experiences, evaluating personae based on these experiences, and constructing relations (or not) between personae and oneself emerged is, as the respondents indicated, a mostly comparative activity.

Klimmt, et al. (2006) found that patterns of increased involvement with characters is associated with more intense parasocial processing. Schramm & Wirth (2010) offer sympathy, antipathy, empathy, counter empathy, and emotional contagion as affective sub-processes associated with parasocial processing. Respondents in the study at hand reported very little affective response and subsequent investment in the characters, but the affective investment they did report was mostly associated with the children in the show(s) and to some degree the women. Respondents often indicated antipathy toward Kody Brown, the male patriarch of *Sister Wives*, as well.

A full exploration of Affective Disposition Theory is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but a brief foray into ADT has value for this particular study. An important question Raney (2004) asks is if moral judgment of a character precedes affect, or if affect precedes moral judgment. In some cases, one or the other may be true. He further argues that our internal schema

(audience frames, scripts, whatever you want to call them) influence our dispositions toward characters.

Raney (2004) tells us that people spend more time evaluating characters according to their dispositions toward those characters rather than through true moral reasoning. This is due to the fact we are cognitive misers. Actually using moral reasoning could induce cognitive dissonance, which we all find ways to avoid (*i.e.* Festinger, 1954). Therefore, disposition would very much be an evaluative schema – and a shorter route to character evaluation that results in consonance. This may relate disposition to peripheral processing, and moral reasoning to central processing. Moreover, we tend to give people (and television characters) we like far more moral latitude simply because we love them.

Raney (2004) also asks: “Is it possible that the viewing motivation of escapism is really just an expression of a desire to morally disengage for the sake of enjoyment?” (p. 363). Enjoyment might come from escaping from a rigid moral code, or it might come from escaping to a place where the viewer can offer unbridled support for a character. In other words, “enjoyment may be associated with the ability to give virtually limitless moral sanction to someone we like” (p. 363). Such a notion also fits well with the “Flipping Channels/Freak Factor” theme. Recalling Walter’s comment about the taboo of polygamy, some respondents may have continued to watch, despite moral revulsion by the practice, as a means of seeing beyond personal moral codes, and deriving some degree of enjoyment in the process.

Though affective processing may occur simultaneously or independently of cognitive processing (Raney, 2004), among the respondents in this study it appeared to come after making social comparison-type judgments. In general the respondents seemed to ask “How are these people different from me? Is it morally right?” which were then followed by an affective state,

followed by a disposition formation. Most of the disposition formations proved to be negative and it is likely, according to ADT, that subsequent evaluations were consistent with the initial negative evaluations of the personae.

Consistent with Zillmann & Bryant's (1975) findings regarding moral retribution, the adult respondents in this study tended to feel that polygamist personae "get what they deserve," unlike younger respondents who theoretically would have advocated for some kind of penalties for practicing polygamy. My respondents leaned toward viewing polygamy as simply a lifestyle choice they would never choose for themselves, and one that creates its own suffering as enough punishment for the practice. This may be seen as divergence, according to social comparison theory, or it may also be viewed as a form of moral disengagement known as "displacing responsibility" (see Raney, 2006), in which either the women or the men in polygamous relationships are blamed for what the viewers felt were unpleasant circumstances for the children, rather than blaming cultural, economic, or other factors that could contribute to polygamous families forming. By morally disengaging, viewers continued to watch.

Several respondents reported parasocial interaction in response to cues from the programming. Horton & Wohl (1956) noted that devices such as camera angles helped establish bonds of intimacy between personae and audiences. Quincy, a liberal mass communication student and professional photographer, described this process in greater detail than others who noted this phenomenon. He admitted that his goal as a wedding photographer was to evoke favorable reactions from his audience. As such, he was more sensitive to the "audience coaching" that invariably comes out of the production process.

Yet others described behavioral or pseudo-behavioral intentions in association with answers to the questions regarding feeling inspired. Considering the low levels of affective

investment in the show(s) among respondents, it seems unlikely that viewing polygamists led to many behavioral changes after viewing. More likely, even when taking away feelings of inspiration, the respondents' most salient behavioral changes in response to viewing polygamists on television was changing the channel or turning off the television, with the following exception.

The minor theme "top of mind awareness" emerged as one related to cognitive processing, but also associated with behavior. With polygamy closer to the "top of mind," some participants were primed to pick up on polygamy in other media such as magazines and music after viewing *Sister Wives* or *Big Love*. Exploring this priming effect is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it has a powerful implication for the parasocial contact hypothesis. The simple existence of shows on polygamy in the media sphere has the potential to draw greater attention to the practice and therefore more processing of the material and mediated personae. Moreover, more opportunities for parasocial interaction with polygamous personae may lead to greater uncertainty reduction (Perse & Rubin, 1989) regarding the practitioners and, therefore, as Schiappa et al. (2006) informs, greater tolerance, greater tolerance for underrepresented groups.

In summary, after describing parasocial contact, participants tended to match the characters' scenarios with their own values and determine their situations were worse off than their own, eliciting generally negative affective results. Those negative results led to negative disposition formations toward the persona, which persisted. Viewers approached the action as it unfolded through downward social comparison, which eventually led to a sense of divergence in which the audience stopped comparing themselves with the characters. At this point, viewers either continued to watch from a downward comparison perspective or simply changed the channel. Divergence is further discussed in the following section on parasocial comparison.

Parasocial Comparison

There is some evidence (Wills, 1981) that suggests people seek downward social comparison with others as a response to “esteem threats that do not lend themselves to instrumental action” (Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons, & Kuyper, 1999). Polygamy may fall into such a category. In the minds of Americans it continues to be associated with Mormonism (Keeter, 2007) and, as a marital lifestyle, is often sexualized (Cragun & Neilsen, 2006). To monogamist respondents, such threats to religious and sexual ideas of normalcy would constitute esteem threats -- ones that could not necessarily be dealt with beyond the sphere of one’s own influence. Such a relationship with the idea of polygamy, when coupled with novelty, or “the freak factor” as often reported by the respondents, offers strong theoretical gratification for watching polygamy on television in the first place, and more evidence to suggest that gratification revolves around feeling better about oneself by watching others worse off.

From an Elkins (1996) perspective, participants saw themselves to a certain degree in the characters and families of polygamous programs, particularly *Sister Wives*. Yet interviews were dominated by a sense of divergence. Recall that Festinger (1954) argued that “the tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between his opinion or ability and one’s own increases” (p. 120). None of the respondents interviewed came from polygamous backgrounds; they frequently suggested a nuclear family upbringing, comprised of one man, one woman, and children, as the basis of their sense of what a “normal” family is.

One way in which the participants compared themselves with the characters was through family size. People often suggested they felt a sense of household chaos and disorder with the *Sister Wives* and *Big Love* families. Brian mentioned “I have one mom and that’s enough to deal with for one lifetime, so I wouldn’t want to imagine [having] three.” As Walter, a liberal mass

communication graduate student noted, “There’s a saying -- ‘why complicate things?’” Others revealed that they had small families, but would like to have large families and the support that they imagined such families may offer. Family size, support, and multiple incomes were the themes commonly associated with what little upward comparison the respondents acknowledged.

As social comparison decreased due to divergence, respondents tended to follow up with comments suggesting a vaguely libertarian (and polite) perspective toward the practice of polygamy. Several respondents noted that polygamy is a lifestyle choice that they themselves would not be interested in practicing, but often seemed to admire the *Sister Wives* for making their plural relationships work. Some continued to watch out of curiosity, despite a shut-down in the comparison process.

The divergence between respondents and the belief systems of the television polygamists explains why none of the respondents reported strong degrees of affective investment. Festinger (1954) tells us, “A person will be less attracted to situations where others are very divergent from him than to situations where others are close to him for both abilities and opinions” (p. 123). Too much divergence between the viewers and *Sister Wives* along with many other television channels from which to choose creates a situation where less divergent and even consonant ideas are readily available. A preference for content consonant with one’s existing idea is the basis of selective exposure as a means of alleviating or avoiding cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), affective dissonance (Raney, 2004; Raney, 2006), and is associated with parasocial interaction and processing (Klimmt, et al., 2006; Levy, 1979; Valkenburg & Peter, 2006). As the interviews demonstrated, the respondents were less attracted to the *Sister Wives* personae whose opinions they perceived to be far different from their own. This also explains the minimal affective

investment in the show and the common response that viewers only watched it when “nothing else was on,” for the “freak factor,” or when flipping through channels.

Limitations

Several limitations affected the results of this particular study. First, the sample was comprised entirely of students, most of them female. Students present special challenges, such as limited crystallization of opinions, fewer life experiences than one would find in older populations in general, and lifestyles very different from those of their non-student counterparts (Mook, 1983; Sears, 1986; Meltzer, Naab, & Daschmann, 2012).

Second, this work is impossible to generalize to other populations. It focuses on students and social comparison as part of their parasocial processing of a very specific set of television characters. We would certainly get different results from looking at other populations or other television shows featuring underrepresented groups.

Finally, reliability is an issue. During the course of this research, the Supreme Court of the United States began reviewing arguments for and against same-sex marriage (Barber, 26-Mar., 2013). One of the arguments against was a classic “slippery slope” argument: same-sex marriage would lead to legalized polygamy. In light of such attention to polygamy as a marital practice, it is likely that the same sample, if interviewed today, would be prone to giving opinions of the *Sister Wives* or *Big Love* characters related to ideas of marriage influenced by recent public debate.

Conclusion

In this study I interviewed students regarding their affective experiences from comparing themselves with such characters. I devised the semi-structured interview questions using items from Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Van YPeren, & Dakof, G.A. (1990). I then looked for redundant themes within the data and applied both social comparison theory (i.e., Buunk, et al., 1990,

Festinger, 1954) and parasocial processing concepts (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008) to the results. What emerges is a behavioral process model that accommodates program selection (“channel flipping”), parasocial comparison, and either continued viewing or additional channel flipping.

Schramm & Wirth’s (2010) model of parasocial processing accounts for many of the processes described by the participants in this study. However, the study at hand adds the specific process of social comparison to the mix. Interviews indicated that parasocial comparison occurs during cognitive processing of the cues delivered by the television show. More specifically, and as Schramm & Wirth’s (2010) work suggests, it occurs during an activation of previous mediated and life experiences. Respondents imaginatively placed themselves -- with their own life experiences -- into roles as additional family members and assessed their situations. Evaluation of the characters’ scenarios and actions spurred parasocial comparison, and in the case of polygamous programming, downward comparison in particular.

As parasocial comparison continued, eventually the process shut down as divergence became more apparent to viewers. Respondents rarely indicated any affective investment in the characters, which suggests that the immediate and pervasive downward parasocial comparison throughout the viewing experience prohibited the viewers not only from forming positive affective dispositions, but any dispositions at all. Existing negative dispositions were likely confirmed through cognitive cues and the associated parasocial comparison process.

What does this indicate about American attitudes toward and tolerance of polygamy as a lifestyle? Returning to the notion of Gamson’s (1998) metaphor of the “two-headed beast,” we see a dichotomy. A general, negative respondent attitude toward polygamy and a distaste for it as a lifestyle choice confirmed the work of many scholars who have studied the topic (i.e. Embry, 1987; Nielsen, 2006; Nielsen & Cragun, 2010; Phipps, 2009). On the other hand, respondents

admitted curiosity and even some degree of tolerance for it, which fits well with Schiappa et al.'s (2006) parasocial contact hypothesis. In the following chapters, we will take a quantitative approach to exploring tolerance of polygamy as a result of viewing such shows.

CHAPTER 5: SURVEYS OF VIEWERS AND STUDENTS

RQ3 asked, “How do viewers of polygamy shows and students differ in terms of attitudes toward polygamy?” To answer this question, I ran a survey and collected data from two very different samples. The purpose of these surveys was largely exploratory. They allowed me to look at differences between samples regarding attitudes toward polygamy and isolate some of those factors that not only affect attitudes, but the theoretical construct of and propensity to engage in social comparison, the effect(s) of exposure to a variety of different shows about polygamy on attitudes, and the role religion may play in such attitudes.

A major assumption behind conducting these two surveys is that exposure to polygamy on television should, as Schiappa, et al. (2006) noted regarding homosexual and transgendered characters, affect attitudes toward the lifestyle. More specifically, they argued that seeing positive portrayals of underrepresented groups should lead to greater tolerance of those groups, while seeing negative or no portrayals should result in less tolerance or more negative attitudes toward those groups.

Exposure to television programming is not the only variable that shapes how we view underrepresented groups. Attitudes toward polygamy are particularly complex and inevitably involve other variables, such as gender (Bennion, 2012; Nielsen & Cragun, 2006), religiosity (Keeter, 2007; Nielsen & Cragun, 2006), and other demographics (Keeter, 2007; Nielsen & Cragun, 2006). By measuring these additional variables, we can get a better idea of what goes in to the formation of attitudes toward polygamists beyond parasocial contact. They also allow us to account for alternative explanations for any differences in tolerance related to increased exposure to such programming.

Furthermore, the survey distributed to students served as a pre-test for the experiment described later in this dissertation, making social comparison (INCOM) and affective results of social comparison (ARSC) measures available for comparison between both viewers and students. Comparing these measures between the samples allowed me to make additional theoretical findings regarding social comparison and parasocial contact.

Therefore, the pertinent variables in this part of the study are contact with polygamists, demographics, social comparison as a personality trait, affective results of parasocial comparison, religiosity, and of course exposure. Though largely exploratory, I am still able to make some theoretical inferences from the findings regarding the effect exposure may have on one's tolerance of people and groups considered different from themselves. The following sections detail the methods used to conduct the study, the findings, and a discussion of the results.

Methods

Measures

Participants were classified as either “viewers” or “students.” Students participated through the Manship School’s research participation program. Among “viewers,” some may have been actual fans of the shows in question, some may have been students at other institutions, and some may have just had a passing interest in polygamy and taking a survey. Viewers received a survey identical to the one administered to students, but self-selected to participate via links posted at various fan and news sites. For all practical purposes, I use the term viewers in this chapter to specifically refer to people who were not solicited through the Manship School Media Effects Lab.

The first set of scale items measured contact with polygamy (e.g. “Are you a polygamist?”; “Do you know any polygamists personally?”) in simple yes/no categories. Religious affiliation (or atheism) was assessed in the same manner. Two questions assessed religious behavior: “I go to religious services/I speak or pray to a higher power” with options ranging from “Never” to “Daily.” The final set of religious questions measured religiosity on 7-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Examples of items included “I would consider myself religious” and “I do my best to live my life according to my spiritual beliefs.”

Next the survey participants were asked to answer questions regarding their attitudes toward male and female polygamists. *Attitudes Toward Polygamists* (ATP) was measured using the *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gays* (ATLG) scale devised by Herek (1988) on 7-point Likert scales, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” and contextualized for polygamists. Items from the ATP scale that assessed attitudes toward female polygamists included “Female polygamists can’t fit into our society” and “The growing number of female polygamists indicates a decline in American morals.” Items assessing attitudes toward male polygamists included “Male polygamists should not be allowed to adopt children,” and “I think male polygamists are disgusting.”

The survey then asked participants which shows about polygamy they had seen. *Big Love*, *Sister Wives*, the Warren Jeffs news coverage, and “other” were offered as examples, but the actual responses were open-ended. Some of the respondents had seen more than one of the options. If a person had seen only news coverage, they were assigned the value of 1. If a person reported seeing news coverage and *Sister Wives*, they were assigned a 2. Respondents who reported seeing three different shows (such as *Big Love*, *Sister Wives*, and news coverage) were

assigned a 3, and so on. To prime their memories, respondents were then asked to cite a specific scene or scenario in which they “experienced feeling better off or worse off than a character from the show.” If they had seen none of these shows/newscasts, they were asked to leave the question blank, and assigned a 0.

Participants were then asked to answer questions measuring *social comparison* using a 7-pt. derivative version of the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) scale, with items identical to those provided by Gibbons & Buunk (1999). This scale measures practice and propensity for social comparison.

Social comparison is often directional (upward/downward). Respondents were then asked, “Think about the television show you indicated in the answer box for a moment. During the viewing experience how often did you feel...? (If you have not seen any of these shows please click NA).” Afterwards, participants were asked to answer items provided by Buunk, B.P., Collins, R.L., Taylor, S.E., Van YPeren, N., & Dakof, G.A. (1990), which measure affective results of social comparison (ARSC). All items were assessed on 4-point scales (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, and 4 = often) with an option of “Not Applicable” for those who had seen none of the shows. A total of four items each tapped downward and upward parasocial comparison. As in the Buunk, et al. (1990) study, subjects were asked how often they feel “lucky” or grateful when exposed to characters whom they deem to be worse off than themselves. Finally, respondents were asked to answer simple demographic questions: gender, age, income, ethnicity, and education.

Procedure

After receiving IRB approval, I ran a pilot study ($N = 35$) in June, 2011 using a web-based online survey. The pilot study allowed Summer Manship enrollees to receive credit for

coursework and allowed me to clean up various errors in the survey. Such errors included spelling, grammar, and punctuation and one duplicated question was removed. Comments on the survey tended to criticize question wording. For example, one comment indicated a semantic problem with an ATP scale item: “The word “sick” is open to many interpretations, ranging from mental illness to physical disgust”. Such comments were considered, but question wording was left intact to remain true to the original (ATLG) items. This survey ran concurrently with the interviews from Chapter 4.

Next, two identical yet separate online surveys were programmed for distributing to participants (*See Appendix A*) and ran from November 20, 2012 through March 19, 2013. For the first survey, participants were recruited through fan sites, fan pages, and news articles of interest to fans and general viewers of the shows *Big Love* and *Sister Wives* (*See Appendix B*). At the beginning of the survey, I conducted a series of weekly Google News searches for articles posted on the topic of polygamy within the previous seven days. I then set up a Google Alert to receive an e-mail notice any time Google News had stories on polygamy, which allowed me to quickly assess whether the stories were related to polygamous television shows. When alerted to a news story regarding polygamy-related entertainment, I posted a solicitation with a survey link in the comments sections of the news stories inviting potential readers to participate in the study. Stories not involving polygamy in popular entertainment (such as Warren Jeffs articles, articles exploring Muslim or African polygamy practice, and articles on marriage equality or polygamy law) were excluded from solicitation. Some of the headlines for stories on polygamy in entertainment included, ““*Sister Wives*’: The Brown Family Vacations, Clashes With Another Polygamist Family” from *Huffingtonpost.com*, ““*Sister Wives* Preview’: ‘The Dark Side of Polygamy’ Airs Tonight” from *Examiner.com*, and ““*Sister Wives*’ Kody Brown Tries To Prove

That Polygamy Isn't Evil" from *Hollywoodlife.com*. Participants were also solicited from fan sites (*Sister Wives* and *Big Love* Facebook pages), and *Sister Wives* blogs such as *Cafemom* which featured articles on the *Sister Wives*. No incentives were offered, and after collection, all data were transferred into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

Student participants were solicited through the Manship School Media Effects Lab from February 27, 2013 through March 12, 2013. These participants were assigned an ID number and received course credit for their participation. To participate, students were required to click a link sent through e-mail, answer the survey questions, and enter their MEL ID numbers in order to receive credit. This survey also served as a pre-test for an experiment described in Chapter 6.

Participants

All viewer subjects ($N = 206$) had visited either a fan site, a Facebook page for polygamy shows, or a news article about one of the polygamy shows or news about polygamy in popular entertainment. The sample was comprised of mostly females ($N = 134$), with 32 males, although 40 participants did not answer the gender question. Respondents reported a mean age of 38.67 ($SD = 11.94$), with 16.52 ($SD = 2.79$) years of education, beginning with the first grade. Personal income was more diverse than the college student sample, with 9% reporting less than \$10K per year, 8% reporting \$10-20K, 8% reporting \$20-30K, 9% reporting \$30-40K, 7% reporting \$40-50K, 8% reporting \$50-60K, 4% reporting \$60-70K, 12% reporting \$70-100K, and 10% reporting over \$100K; 39 participants did not answer the question. The majority of the participants ($N = 139$) indicated White/Caucasian (90.4%) as their ethnicity, with 5% black, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 5% "Mixed", and 1% other.

Student participants were solicited through the Manship School Media Effects Lab subject pool. All subjects ($N = 185$) were enrolled in Manship mass communication courses. The

sample was comprised of mostly female ($N=154$) students, with 28 males, and three participants who did not answer the gender question. Respondents reported a mean age of 19.87 ($SD = 1.49$), with 14.07 ($SD = 1.72$) years of education beginning with the first grade. Ninety-seven percent reported a personal income of less than \$30,000, with only one subject reporting an income of \$50,000-\$60,000; four participants did not answer the question. The majority of the participants ($N = 144$) indicated White/Caucasian (79%) as their ethnicity, with 12% Black, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 3% “Mixed”, and 1% other.

Overall ($N = 348$), the respondents in the larger sample (both students and viewers) were mostly female ($N = 288$) rather than male ($N = 60$). Respondents reported a mean age of 28.87 ($SD = 12.55$) and had over fifteen years of formal education ($M = 15.24$, $SD = 2.60$). The large number of students in the sample skewed income downward, with 52% reporting less than \$10K per year, 8% reporting \$10-20K, 6% reporting \$20-30K, 5% reporting \$30-40K, 4% reporting \$40-50K, 5% reporting \$50-60K, 3% reporting \$60-70K, 7% reporting \$70-100K, and 6% reporting over \$100K. Finally, the larger sample was predominantly white/Caucasian (81%), with some 10% Black, 4% Mixed, 2% Hispanic, 1%, and 1% Other.

Results

Table 5.1: Scale Properties shows the properties of the religiosity, ATP, ATPW, ATPM, INCOM, and ARSC scales. About 60% of the viewers of polygamy shows indicated they were religious while 80% of the students indicated yes to the same question. An index measure of religiosity ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.68$) was devised using the three religiosity measures (“I would consider myself religious,” “I believe in a higher power,” and “I do my best to live my life according to my spiritual

Table 5.1:
Scale properties

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Cronbach's α</u>
Religiosity	3	5.43	1.68	.86
ATPW	10	3.25	1.43	.92
ATPM	10	3.93	1.68	.95
ATP	20	3.59	1.51	.96
INCOM	10	4.49	1.03	.88

beliefs”). Table 5.2: Religious Affiliations displays the results of the categorical religion questions.

Table 5.2:
Religious Affiliations

<u>Religion</u>	<u>Viewers</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Students</u>	<u>%</u>
Atheist	35	17	12	7
Catholic	24	12	81	44
Protestant	53	26	41	23
Mormon	21	10	0	0
Muslim	2	1	0	0
Jewish	7	3	3	2
Buddhist	12	6	3	2
Other	52	25	41	22
Total	206	100	181	100

Among the viewers, 43% had seen Big Love, 69% had seen Sister Wives, 33% had seen coverage of Warren Jeffs, 18% had seen other polygamy shows or documentaries, and 1% reported never seeing polygamy on television. Within the student sample, 8% had seen Big

Love, 50% had seen *Sister Wives*, none had seen coverage of Warren Jeffs or other polygamy shows or documentaries, and 1% reported never seeing polygamy on television. To assess the exposure variable, variety of shows seen were combined into an additive index and used in a descriptive discriminant analysis described later in this section.

Two separate 10-item index measures of attitudes toward polygamist women (ATPW) and attitudes toward polygamist men (ATPM) were created, and together formed a 20-item index measure (ATP) of attitudes toward both polygamist men and women (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92, .95, .96$, respectively). As most of the ATP items are negatively worded, positively-worded items were reverse coded. With all items negatively worded, all twenty items were then reverse coded so that higher scores indicated greater attitudes of tolerance. Recoding the items so that higher scores reflected more positive attitudes toward polygamists made for greater ease of analysis. To assess the attitudes variable, all ATP measures were combined into an index and used in a descriptive discriminant analysis described later in this section.

Next, an index of social comparison was created using all 10 social comparison items. See *Table 5.1: Scale Properties* for details. For the task of examining differences of the affective results of social comparison, items were left as individual items, rather than compiling them into indexes, and t-tests were performed. To assess the influence of social comparison, INCOM items were combined into an index and used in a descriptive discriminant analysis described later in this section.

Regarding the affective results of parasocial comparison with television characters, the viewers and students showed significant differences in only three of the affective outcomes. Students ($M = 2.87, SD = 1.01$) were significantly more likely than viewers ($M = 2.70, SD = 1.14$) to report feeling anxious after watching characters worse off than themselves $t(267) = -$

1.22, $p < .05$. Viewers ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.16$) were significantly more likely than students ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .84$) to report feeling comforted after watching characters whom they perceived to be better-off than themselves; $t(265) = 1.31$, $p < .01$. Finally, after viewing characters better-off than themselves, students ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.20$) were significantly more likely than viewers ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.36$) to report feeling inspired after viewing polygamists deemed “better-off” than themselves; $t(266) = -.46$, $p = .05$. None of the other tests were significant.

ARSC items were then compiled into four measures reflecting positive and negative affective results of upward and downward social comparison conditions. Independent samples t-tests revealed only one difference approaching significance between viewers and students. Viewers ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .96$) were significantly more likely than students ($M = 1.87$, $SD = .79$) to experience a positive affective state as a result of parasocial comparison with people they deemed to be better-off than themselves $t(1, N = 222) = 2.56$, $p = .01$. Finally, ARSC items were compiled into two scales of upward and downward parasocial comparison, but independent samples t-tests showed no significant differences between the groups. The following section describes the results of a descriptive discriminant analysis (DDA) performed involving variables other than the ARSC items. DDA was chosen as the statistical method of analysis over simple t-tests, as the case of a 2-level categorical dependent variable (viewers vs. students) offers the advantage of categorizing groups based on discriminating variables.

In addition to the t-tests reported in the ARSC analysis, I also ran a descriptive discriminant analysis (DDA) to examine the differences between viewers and students. Age, income, education along with the exposure, religiosity, ATP, and INCOM scales were treated as independent variables with group membership (viewers or students) as the dependent variable. The model ($N = 292$) proved highly significant ($\text{Canonical } r = .82$, $p < .01$) with age, income,

exposure, education, and positive attitudes toward polygamists predicting membership in the viewer group, with social comparison (INCOM) and religiosity predicting membership in the student group. The model successfully classified 91% of the viewer cases (centroid = .99) and 97% of the student cases (centroid = -2.052).

Students and viewers clearly had differing demographic, religiosity, and viewing backgrounds. The following regression tables present the results of accounting for demographic variables, knowing polygamists, religiosity, and social comparison, and their influences on attitudes toward polygamists. Considering both samples, the only demographic finding that proved significant was being female; women are less tolerant of polygamy (specifically, *polygyny*) than men. Several factors, as the previous regressions demonstrated, defined the samples. When accounting for all variables (demographics, knowing polygamists, exposure, religiosity, and social comparison), religiosity ($b = -.38$) and being white ($b = -.09$) emerged as negative predictors of tolerance for polygamy among the student sample. With the viewer sample, education ($b = -.34$) and knowing polygamists personally ($b = -.30$) negatively predicted positive attitudes toward polygamists.

Some of these findings were surprising considering the extant literature. As mentioned, much of this study was exploratory. The following discussion offers explanations for the demographic findings and some theoretical discussion regarding the social comparison findings.

Table 5.3
Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Viewers' ATP

Variable	B	SE(B)	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.(<i>p</i>)
<u>Model 1</u>					
Gender	-1.11	.34	-.26	-3.27	.00***
Age	-.01	.01	-.07	-.76	.45
Income	.01	.05	.02	.23	.82
Ethnicity	-.03	.33	.01	-.10	.92
Education	-.22	.05	-.33	-4.12	.00***
<u>Model 2</u>					
Gender	-.80	.34	-.19	-2.37	.02**
Age	-.02	.01	-.14	-1.66	.10*
Income	.03	.04	.06	.67	.51
Ethnicity	.01	.32	.00	.04	.97
Education	-.22	.05	-.33	-4.24	.00***
Know Polygamists	-1.08	.29	-.30	-3.74	.00***
Exposure	.16	.11	.11	1.48	.14
Religiosity	-.04	.07	-.04	-.56	.58
<u>Model 3</u>					
Gender	-.79	.34	-.19	-2.34	.02**
Age	-.02	.01	-.14	-1.57	.12
Income	.03	.05	.06	.74	.46
Ethnicity	.02	.32	.01	.07	.95
Education	-.23	.05	-.34	-4.27	.00***
Know Polygamists	-1.08	.29	-.30	-3.73	.00***
Exposure	.16	.11	.12	1.54	.13
Religiosity	-.03	.07	-.04	-.51	.61
Social Comparison	.07	.12	.05	.59	.55

p* < .10; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01; R² = .18, .28, .28

Note: All collinearity tolerances were above .87, indicating no problems with multicollinearity.

Table 5.4
Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Students' ATP

Variable	B	SE(B)	β	t	Sig.(p)
Model 1					
Gender	-.759	.23	-.267	-3.38	.00***
Age	.00	.09	.00	.00	1.00
Income	.21	.19	.11	1.13	.26
Ethnicity	-.14	.21	-.05	-.63	.53
Education	-.09	.08	-.13	-1.21	.23
Model 2					
Gender	-.52	.22	-.18	-2.39	.02**
Age	-.00	.08	-.00	-.02	.98
Income	.20	.17	.10	1.18	.24
Ethnicity	-.39	.20	-.15	-1.93	.06*
Education	-.07	.07	-.10	-.99	.32
Know Polygamists	.48	.40	.09	1.192	.24
Exposure	.18	.14	.10	1.33	.19
Religiosity	-.28	.06	-.39	-5.10	.00***
Model 3					
Gender	-.53	.22	-.19	-2.41	.02**
Age	.00	.08	.00	.00	1.00
Income	.21	.17	.10	1.19	.24
Ethnicity	-.36	.21	-.14	-1.72	.09*
Education	-.07	.07	-.09	-.94	.35
Know Polygamists	.43	.41	.08	1.062	.29
Exposure	.19	.14	.10	1.35	.18
Religiosity	-.28	.06	-.38	-5.00	.00***
Social Comparison	-.06	.09	-.05	-.59	.55

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; $R^2 = .11, .26, .26$

Discussion

This study found several key differences between viewers of polygamy programming and students in terms of religiosity, exposure, attitudes toward polygamists, social comparison, and affective results of social comparison. Most notably, being female was a strong negative predictor of attitudes toward polygamists. The thinking uncovered in Chapter 4 suggests that the women in polygamous marriages are damaged somehow or suffer from low self-esteem. Polygamous men, on the other hand, are viewed as taking advantage of these women's alleged problems. This suggests that non-polygamists may see victim-victimizer relationships among polygamists in which the men victimize and control the women. Therefore, as the data imply, male polygamists may be seen by women as bad guys and female polygamists may be seen as victims, sometimes through their own faults and/or choosing the lifestyle.

There were no positive predictors of attitudes for male, female, and both male and female polygamists in either sample. Among fans, several counterintuitive findings that go against the literature (Nielsen & Cragun, 2006) emerged. First, education was a significant negative predictor of tolerance. With this particular question, being asked to think about polygamous television within the survey may have played a role. It is quite fashionable to knock television as a mindless, or even dangerous medium (i.e. Postman, 1985; Mander, 1978), and answering a survey on polygamous television may have shaped the answers offered by the respondents. Second, education has generally been associated with greater tolerance for polygamy (Nielsen & Cragun, 2006). With this particular sample of viewers, this was not the case. Education proved to be a significant negative predictor of tolerance. Again, it is likely that intolerance scores may have been more artifacts of thinking about television polygamy than thinking about the real-life practice of polygamy. Third, being a polygamist or knowing polygamists personally was a

negative predictor of attitudes toward polygamists. This also runs counter to Nielsen & Cragun's (2006) finding that knowing polygamists personally is associated with more positive attitudes, as well as Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis. As with education this finding may be explained by respondents answering questions regarding their attitudes toward television polygamists rather than real-life polygamists.

Students indicated higher degrees of religiosity than viewers. Nielsen & Cragun (2006) noted a phenomenon in which non-polygamists tended to attach sexuality to polygamy as a marital practice. For many people, sexual behavior is affected by religious beliefs. We also know that Louisiana residents tend to report higher levels of religiosity and conservatism (Goidel, Climek, and Brou, 2013) than people in many states. In Chapter 4, Debbie asked, "is this really happening? Could this be a new way of life?" Based on the student data in this study, I argue that religiosity among students is a major predictor of aversion to, negative attitudes toward, and intolerance of polygamy. For the students, a sense of tradition is associated with monogamy (as we learned in Chapter 4), upbringing in a nuclear family, and religion. Polygamy, though a traditional arrangement often associated with religion, is not seen as traditional by students in Louisiana, and as Nielsen & Cragun (2006) reported, is seen as a sexual arrangement rather than a religious calling. (Note: in Chapter 6 we will explore whether viewing polygamy shows can overcome this understanding and/or increase tolerance of polygamy).

Viewers reported greater exposure to a variety of polygamy shows. Exposure did not account for any differences in ATP scores in either of the samples. One possible explanation for this is that people actually sought a sense of superiority to the characters, which the shows helped to build. Recall from Chapter 4 that students had a tendency toward downward social comparison with polygamous TV shows, which resulted in a sense of divergence and minimal

affective investment in the shows. Along this line of reasoning, we can reasonably assume that a fairly common response to shows on polygamy is one of downward parasocial comparison, which is created or reinforced by intolerance for polygamists. Students also had far more negative views of polygamists than did viewers. Lack of exposure, according to these regression models, does not account for this.

Social comparison also failed to predict attitudes toward polygamy within either of the samples. In the student sample, this finding may at first seem inconsistent with the profound effect religiosity had on intolerance. However, recall that the INCOM scale measures social comparison as a personality trait. It is plausible that respondents, rather than comparing themselves with individuals in polygamy shows, may be comparing the individuals in polygamy shows with sets of cultural and religious mores they have internalized, but which exist outside of themselves. Also, recall from Chapter 4 the powerful theme of divergence; the social comparison function shuts down when one deems another as categorically different from oneself (Festinger, 1954). Though arguably influential, the data from these samples suggest that there are much stronger (and significant) predictors of tolerance than one's propensity to compare oneself with polygamist television characters.

Students were more likely to feel anxious when comparing themselves with characters deemed worse-off than themselves than were the viewers. On the other hand, students were more likely to feel inspired when viewing characters deemed better-off than themselves, but viewers were more likely to feel comforted from seeing characters better-off than themselves.

In addition to the findings, this study has several limitations that should be addressed. First, student samples generally have different characteristics than non-student samples.

According to Sears (1986), undergrads

... tend among other things, to have incompletely formulated senses of self, rather uncrystallized: sociopolitical attitudes, unusually strong cognitive skills, strong needs for peer approval, tendencies to be compliant to authority, quite unstable group relationships, little material self-interests in public affairs, and unusual egocentricity. (p. 527)

This further offers sound reasoning for why student INCOM scores were higher than those of viewers. Recall that Gibbons & Buunk (1999) described high INCOM scorers: such a person “(a) is interpersonal more than introspectively oriented, being sensitive to the behavior of others, and (b) has a degree of uncertainty about the self, along with an interest in reducing this self-uncertainty and, in so doing, improving” (p. 138). Such a description fits our understanding of college students better than our understanding of older, more educated viewers with higher incomes.

This survey, despite suffering from the limitations of a lack of sample frame and self-selection, offers some strong data regarding attitudes toward polygamists and social comparison that can be compared to the experimental results. According to the parasocial contact hypothesis, more time spent viewing these shows will be associated with different levels of tolerance for polygamists, perhaps even more dramatic than those we will see from the experimental results. Collecting data from viewers of these shows offers a unique opportunity with which to compare the results of the experiment.

Neither of these samples can be generalized to the larger American population. The viewer sample is difficult to generalize to fans or to other viewers due to the self-selected nature of the responses. We may be able to generalize to other students, to some degree, with the student sample, but students, as is well-established in the literature, are very different from the American aggregate in that they tend to have less-developed socio-political opinions and stronger cognitive abilities (Meltzer, Naab, & Daschmann, 2012; Sears, 1986).

What value or insights do these samples offer into understanding American attitudes toward polygamy? Though both samples independently and together cannot be used to generalize findings to the larger American public, they do provide us some insight into attitudes toward polygamy as results of gender differences. In both samples, being female was a strong negative predictor of tolerance. The findings in this study, in general, highlight many differences in people who have self-selected to explore polygamy versus those who have not, or, have done so to a lesser extent. These differences offer insight into tolerance of other cultures as a result of media exposure, as we continue to explore attitudes of polygamy in this dissertation.

Conclusion

In this study I looked for differences in how people with greater amounts of exposure to shows on polygamy differed from a student sample. People in the viewer sample had greater exposure to polygamy in both mediated and real-life forms. They also had more positive affective results of parasocial comparison with the characters than did the students and were more accepting of polygamy. The students, on the other hand, had greater religiosity, were more prone to parasocial comparison, and had more negative affective results of exposure to polygamous television characters. The common predictor of intolerance of polygamy between these two samples was being female, which is likely to be a result of the polygynous nature of polygamy television in which women are subservient to or dependent upon male characters.

CHAPTER 6: EXPERIMENT

Introduction

Chapter 5 examined differences between a group who had exposed itself to a greater variety of polygamy shows and a group who had significantly less exposure. In this chapter, I conducted an experiment that exposed people to different portrayals of polygamists and examine the results. I primarily conducted this experiment to see how different portrayals of polygamists led to different outcomes regarding tolerance. The experiment also provided the opportunity to look at parasocial processing as it relates to parasocial comparison, and how both relate to tolerance. As a result, it provides valuable theoretical additions to our understanding of the role of parasocial comparison within parasocial processing, as well as how such processing affects tolerance of underrepresented groups.

The experimental part of the dissertation involved extensive work collecting data in preparation for building the stimuli, as well as building the stimuli themselves. The first step involved limiting the potential stimulus material to a manageable volume. In a brief survey, students assessed the dominant fourteen *Big Love* characters, who appeared in all five seasons, as positive, negative, or mixed. Data from this survey provided a character-centric foundation from which to build the conditions. After that, I broke down most of the five seasons of *Big Love* into segments. I then edited together three separate episodes, each ranging from 45-49 minutes in length, from the segments, and arranged the stories in a coherent manner to offer distinct composite narratives revolving around the three characters previously identified in the survey as positive, mixed, and negative. The episodes were then tested on Manship School Media Effects Lab participants in November 2012. Unfortunately, the first round of tests revealed validity problems: students were seeing the mixed condition as negative. With improved measures and

priming materials, retesting in February and March of 2013 generated acceptable results. Finally, the stimuli and post-tests were administered in an experimental setting over the course of eight weeks. The following sections detail the process from production to implementation to the final analysis of the results.

Stimulus Development

First, I ran a survey to assess perceptions of *Big Love* characters to find out if viewers perceived these characters as positive, negative, or mixed. The purpose of this survey was to identify the specific character types (positive, negative, mixed) for use in developing character-centric video stimuli based on people's opinions of the characters. Higher scores on items, in general, indicated greater liking for, perceived understanding, and agreeableness with the characters in question. All items were measured on 7-point Likert scales ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Six of the items were adapted from Rubin & Perse's PSI scale. An example includes, "I feel sorry for this character when he/she makes a mistake." Three affective items from the parasocial processing scale were used. An example includes, "This character makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend." Additional questions measured how respondents judged the character in terms of morality, attractiveness, intelligence, and general goodness/badness.

I solicited 150 respondents through the Media Effects Lab (MEL) subject pool. Students were first screened to make sure they had seen the television show *Big Love*, and those who had were offered course credit in exchange for their participation. An alternate exercise was made available for students under the age of 18, but none requested it. The following table provides a summary of the numeric findings. *N* reflects the number of respondents who recognized the character from the show.

Table 6.1:
Big Love Character Recognition

<u>Character</u>	<u>N Recognition</u>	<u>% Recognized</u>
Sarah Henrickson	94	78%
Barbara Henrickson	91	75%
Margene Heffmann	89	74%
Bill Henrickson	82	68%
Alby Grant	78	65%
Nicki Grant	70	58%
Lois Henrickson	58	48%
Ben Henrickson	55	46%
Don Embry	49	41%
Heather Tuttle	48	40%
Roman Grant	44	36%
Ronda Volmer	38	31%
Frank Harlow	36	30%
Hollis Green	25	21%

$N = 121$

The main character's (Bill Henrickson) father, Frank Harlow, emerged as the least-liked and least-pleasant character. Open-ended responses regarding Frank Harlow included, "He was a bad guy; he beat his wives," "Bill's dad, although not always successful, seems to be very [sic] conniving and just someone who isn't very morally just," and "neutral guy, neither good or bad didn't like his relationship with Lois and the effects it had on Bill." Respondents overwhelmingly indicated their distaste for the character in the comments, though a few assessed him as "neutral" or "mixed" while offering redeeming qualities to support their assessment.

Bill's daughter Sarah Henrickson ranked the highest of all the characters ($M = 5.24$) and had the fewest open-ended comments indicating she had a "neutral" or "mixed" character. However, I selected Bill's wife Margene ($M = 5.22$) as the unifying basis for building the positive stimulus material. The rationale for this decision is twofold. First, as a wife, Margene

was a more important character who received more screen time than Sarah. Second, Margene was a consistently strong character, whereas Sarah's character performed more of a supporting role in seasons 1,2, and 4. Experience with the entire series demonstrated that the existing body of *Big Love* episodes offers a greater wealth of material surrounding Margene's character from which to draw stimulus materials than it does surrounding Sarah's character. For these reasons, Margene provided a better choice for building a positive stimulus.

Rather than use the means to select a "mixed" character upon which to build a stimulus, I turned to the open-ended questions. All characters were seen to some degree as "neutral" or "mixed." Nicki received the most explicit indications of her "mixed" character. Her mean score of 3.86 -- right in the middle of the distribution -- lends further support to the idea of the character's very "mixed" nature.

Stimulus Materials

The process of breaking *Big Love* down into character-centric segments proved to be an experience worthy of a lengthier discussion. The ultimate goal was to create three one-hour segments that reflected polygamists in positive, negative, and neutral manners. In the process, I captured a glimpse of the inside of the minds of the people involved in the original telling of the stories.

The interconnectedness of a multitude of characters proved to be a great challenge to overcome in trying to isolate storylines. Many characters and storylines seemed useless at first, but later would prove to illuminate specific characters in manners that brought out the extreme emotional valences we experience when applying our knowledge of the characters to their behaviors. Polygamy itself presents a unique challenge. By choosing character-centric storylines, ultimately the other characters go ignored. Given the situation of plural marriage, ignoring key

characters admittedly comes from a monogamous perspective, is ethnocentric, and does not do the interconnectedness of polygamous situations justice.

Three videos resulted from this process reflecting positive, negative, and mixed conditions. A video shown to a control group was selected due to its complete irrelevance regarding the topic of polygamy. In *Secrets of Our Living Planet: The Emerald Band*, a British host takes viewers on an excursion through the plant and animal life of rainforests (White, 2012).

Manipulation Checks

Students ($N = 48$) arrived at the research facility and were asked to read a page about the series (*Big Love*) and main character in the segment (Frank, Nicki, or Margene; See Appendix H). Students were then led into a living room-like facility and took seats either on a sofa or in a chair. Students were asked to watch a 45-48 minute segment featuring a positive character and condition (Margene), a negative character and condition (Frank), and a mixed character and condition (Nicki). After the segments were over, students were asked to sit at computers with surveys loaded and answer questions regarding the tone of the episode. Measures included items to assess positivity, mixture of positivity and negativity, and parasocial dimensions (affinity for show and character).

Results of Manipulation Checks

Overall the negative (Frank) and positive (Margene) segments tested well. A one-way ANOVA with a Student-Neuman-Keuls post-hoc test revealed that on the positivity index, Frank ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.10$) tested lower than Nicki ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.24$), both of whom tested significantly lower than Margene ($M = 5.50$, $SD = .84$); $F(2, 21) = 23.64$; $p < .01$. On the mixed scale, there was no significant difference in tone between the segments $F(2, 21) = 1.38$, $p = n.s.$ Based on the means, Margene scored the highest ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.49$), followed by Nicki ($M =$

3.95, $SD = 2.12$) and Frank ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.80$). On the parasocial and character/affinity scale Frank ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.35$) and Nicki ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .80$) scored significantly lower than Margene ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.10$); $F(2, 21) = 8.22$, $p < .01$, indicating that Nicki was seen almost as negatively as Frank.

In an attempt to salvage the first manipulation checks, items pertaining only to the main character were included to create a scale. These items included “The main character was very positive,” “Sometimes I really loved the main character for what he/she did,” “I find this character to be an intelligent character,” and “I find this character to be of good moral character.” Items were then compiled into a 4-item scale ($M = 15.77$, $SD = 7.39$) which demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$). Sample size was too small to run exploratory factor analysis, as Gorsuch (1983) recommends at least 100 cases, and attempting to salvage the first round of manipulation checks was abandoned.

However, it did provide some insight for a second round of manipulation checks. One plausible explanation for the scores on the mixed scale is that the subjects, having seen the Margene episode, were in a slightly more “agreeable” state than those who had seen Nicki and Frank segments, and were more prone to agree with the statements (See Appendix C) in the mixed scale. The more plausible explanation is that the first run of manipulation checks suffered from poor measurement.

Despite poor measurement, it became clear that the Nicki segment was seen as more negative than mixed by the participants. It is possible that the final scene in the Nicki segment, which included both a murder scene alternating with a backyard poolside baptism, left the viewers with a negative view of the segment. The Frank and Margene segments, relative to each other, performed acceptably well, so I decided not to adjust their content for additional tests.

Results of Additional Manipulation Checks

After manipulation checks failed to yield credible results, I adopted manipulation check measures used by Ramasubramanian & Sanders (2009). These measures have been tested and used successfully in other research (i.e. Ramasubramanian & Sanders, 2009) regarding attitudes toward individual characters and groups. For the work at hand, these questions assessed perceptions of both the main characters as individuals, as well as polygamists as a group within the segments using 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” (see Appendix D). To better-assess the “mixed condition” in this second round of manipulation checks, additional questions were included that tapped both positive and negative aspects simultaneously. Examples include “I felt the main character in this episode was usually good,” “Generally made morally questionable decisions,” and “often demonstrated loyalty.”

Participants were again recruited through the Manship School Media Effects Lab. Over the course of two weeks, students from the subject pool arrived at the research facility and were asked to read a half-page summary about the series (*Big Love*) and the main character in their designated episode (Frank, Nicki, or Margene; See Appendix H). Students were then led into a living room-like facility and took seats either on a sofa or in a chair. The participants watched a 45-48 minute segment featuring stimuli based on either a positive character (Margene), a negative character (Frank), a mixed character (Nicki), or a control condition (*Secrets of Our Living Planet: The Emerald Band*). Immediately after the segments were over, students answered questions regarding the attributes of the episode’s main character via an online survey. After all the data were collected, it was transferred into SPSS for analysis. Table 6.2: Manipulation Check Participants shows the numbers of participants in each condition:

Table 6.2:
Manipulation Check Participants

<u>Participants</u>	<u>N</u>
Negative (Frank)	10
Positive (Margene)	12
Mixed	16
Control	10

I began the analysis by replacing missing values with the series means. This particular data set had only 17 missing answers (out of 2832 responses), which is slightly more than half a percent. Next, I reverse coded all negatively-worded items so that higher scores indicated more positive impressions. The original negatively-worded items were saved for use with additional analysis procedures. After that, I compiled the index using all 22 items and tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The results of the index's performance are displayed in *Table 6.3: Scale Attributes*:

Table 6.3:
Scale Attributes

<u>Attribute Index</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Cronbach's α</u>
Main Character	22	4.17	1.42	.95

One-way Analysis of variance with a S-N-K post-hoc test demonstrated significant differences in perceptions of the main characters. Participants indicated the negative (Frank) condition ($M = 2.59$, $SE = 0.29$) was significantly more negative than the mixed (Nicki) condition ($M = 3.50$, $SE = .22$), which was significantly less negative than the positive (Margene) condition ($M = 5.03$, $SE = .24$). The nature show host in the control group was viewed as the

most positive of all ($M = 5.69$, $SD = .29$) the conditions, but not significantly different from the positive condition. *Table 6.4: Manipulation Checks: Characters and Attributes* displays the results.

Table 6.4
Manipulation Checks: Characters and Attributes

<u>Condition</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SE</u>
Negative	2.59	(.29)
Mixed	3.50	(.22)
Positive	5.03	(.24)
Control	5.69	(.29)

$F(3, 46) = 25.77, p < .05$

Next, I used a series of additional manipulation checks (From Oliver, et. al YEAR; Ersner-Hershfield, et al., 2008; Kaplan, 1972) to determine whether the mixed condition was truly mixed. Kaplan (1972) offers a commonly-used manipulation check formula specifically designed to measure degree of “mixedness” in which ME refers to “mixed emotion,” PA refers to “positive affect,” and NA refers to “negative affect”:

$$ME = PA + NA - |PA - NA|$$

To build the variables for the Kaplan (1972) formula, I created indexes using the following formulae:[1]

$$PA = \Sigma \text{ positive attribute items} / 16$$

$$NA = \Sigma \text{ negative attribute items} / 6$$

I then created a variable called ABSMIXEDINDEX, which represented the absolute value of $PA - NA$. Finally, I created a variable called KAPLANINDEX using the Kaplan (1972) formula.

The next step involved running a simple ANOVA with an S-N-K post-hoc test using “Character” as the fixed variable and KAPLANINDEX as the dependent variable. Table 6.5: *Manipulation Checks: Characters and Attributes*) displays the results.

Table 6.5
Manipulation Checks: Characters and Attributes

<u>Condition</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SE</u>
Negative	4.65	(.45)
Mixed	7.06	(.34)
Positive	5.87	(.38)
Control	3.33	(.43)

$F(3,47) = 31.39, p < .05$

This ANOVA demonstrated that the control condition ($M = 3.33, SE = .43$) was significantly less mixed than the negative condition, ($M = 4.65, SE = .45$), which was significantly less mixed than the positive condition ($M = 5.87, SE = .38$), which was significantly less mixed than the Mixed condition ($M = 7.06, SE = .34$). In other words, the Mixed condition was significantly more mixed than the other two conditions. Satisfied with the manipulation checks, I then began conducting the actual experiment. The following sections detail the measures and results of the experiment. The procedures for running subjects were identical to the procedures described in the previous section.

Experiment Measures

First, students were asked to identify the main character from the segment they had viewed. The survey asked, “Who was the main character in the segment you just viewed? In other words, which character did the segment tend to focus on?” This was a simple categorical measure with options of “Nicki Grant” (mixed condition), “Frank Harlow” (negative condition), “Margene Heffman” (positive condition), and “Nature Show Host” (control condition).

Next, respondents were asked to answer parasocial processing questions. All items came from Schramm & Wirth (2010) and were measured on 7-point Likert scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Whereas Schramm & Wirth (2010) used many more items in their study, they also argued for “further studies to have a more ‘manageable tool’ ... with up to 4-6 items for each of the three PSI dimensions (cognitive, affective, behavioral)” (p. 34). Concurring with the need to avoid survey fatigue and attrition among respondents, and considering the number of items measured in the post-test, I followed their suggestion by limiting the parasocial processing items to six cognitive items, three affective items, and three behavioral items (as presented in Schramm & Wirth, 2010).

After answering the parasocial processing items, respondents were asked how much they agreed with simple statements on the ATPW (Attitudes Toward Polygamist Women) and ATPM (Attitudes Toward Polygamist Men) scales. Each scale included 10 items adapted for male and female polygamists from Herek’s (1988) ATLG scale. All items were measured on 7-point Likert scales ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Respondents were then asked eight questions from the INCOM (Buunk & Gibbons, 1998) reworded for parasocial comparison with the main characters in the video. All responses were measured on 7-point Likert scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

Finally, respondents were asked to cite a specific scene or storyline they remembered from the segment in which they experienced feeling better off or worse off than the main character from the show. The purpose of this question was to prime them to think about a situation from which to answer Affective Results of Social Comparison (ARSC) questions. The ARSC scale included eight items measured, again, on 4-point scales with options of “Never,” “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” and “Often.”

Results

This section presents the results of the formal experiment. Student participants were solicited through the Manship School Media Effects Lab subject pool. All subjects ($N = 99$) were enrolled in Manship School mass communication courses. The sample was comprised of mostly female ($N=85$) students, with 14 males. Respondents reported a mean age of 19.98 ($SD = 1.36$), with 14.11 ($SD = 1.97$) years of education beginning with the first grade. Ninety percent reported a personal income of less than \$10,000, with five participants reporting an income of \$10,000-\$20,000 and three subjects reporting an income of \$20,000-\$30,000; two participants did not answer the income question. The majority of the participants ($N = 99$) indicated White/Caucasian (78%) as their ethnicity, with 12% Black, 2% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 3% “Mixed”, and 2% other.

The parasocial comparison scale had a very low reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .56$) due to negatively-worded items. When the negatively-worded items “I did not compare how the main character did things with how I would do the same things,” “I think the main character from the video is not as good at doing things as I am,” and “I never considered my situation in life relative to that of the main character in the video” were removed, however, the scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .91$). The following table (6.6: *Experiment Scale Properties*) shows the characteristics of the scales used in this experiment.

As in the surveys, ARSC measures (taken after the viewings) were compiled into two scales of upward and downward parasocial comparison. Higher scores indicated greater affective results from greater parasocial comparison. Though less than perfect measures of directional comparison, these measures provided both an indication of directional comparison, as well as the affective results of engaging in such comparison.

Table 6.6:
Experiment Scale properties

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Items</u>	M	SD	<u>Cronbach's α</u>
ATPW	10	3.95	1.13	.87
ATPM	10	4.60	1.41	.89
ATP	20	4.32	1.14	.93
Parasocial				
Cognitive	6	4.21	.97	.67
Affective	2	3.23	1.52	.77
Behavioral	2	2.91	1.56	.74
Total	10	3.76	.86	.70
Parasocial Comparison	5	3.11	1.54	.91
ARSC Upward	4	2.45	.54	.83
ARSC Downward	4	3.07	.73	.81

H1 stated that “Downward parasocial comparison will be associated with lower levels of affective parasocial processing.” Pearson correlations indicated no significant relationship between affective parasocial processing and downward parasocial comparison ($r = .04, p = n.s.$). I then ran a partial correlation for affective processing and downward parasocial comparison, controlling for cognitive and behavioral processing, with insignificant results $r(95) = .09, p = n.s.$

H2 stated that “Downward social comparison will be associated with lower levels of tolerance for polygamy.” Pearson correlations indicated no significant relationship between downward parasocial comparison and attitudes toward polygamy ($r = -.03, p = n.s.$).

H3 stated that “Upward social comparison will be associated with higher levels of cognitive parasocial processing.” Upward parasocial comparison indeed demonstrated a significant correlation with cognitive parasocial processing ($r = .21, p < .05$). Furthermore, I found a positive and significant partial correlation between upward parasocial comparison and

cognitive parasocial processing, after controlling for affective and behavioral processing: $r(95) = .33, p < .01$.

H4 stated that “Upward social comparison will be associated with higher levels of tolerance for polygamy.” Pearson correlations indicated no significant relationship between affective parasocial processing and downward parasocial comparison ($r = .09, p = n.s.$).

H5 stated that “People exposed to a positive portrayal of a polygamist will indicate greater acceptance of polygamy” while H6 stated “People exposed to a negative portrayal of a polygamist will indicate less acceptance of polygamy.” One-way analysis of variance with an S-N-K post-hoc test indicated that the differences approached significance. Subjects indicated more negative attitudes toward polygamists after viewing the negative ($M = 3.33, SD = .90$) condition, with a slight increase in tolerance after viewing the mixed condition ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.30$), and an even greater increase in tolerance following the positive condition ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.09$). The control group showed only a slightly higher tolerance ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.07$) for polygamists after viewing the nature show than did students who viewed the negative and mixed stimuli $F(3, 98) = 2.54, p = .06$. A second one-way ANOVA was run with the mixed condition excluded from the analysis. Students who viewed the positive condition ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.09$) indicated significantly more tolerance for polygamists than those who viewed the control condition ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.07$) and both groups who viewed the positive and control stimuli indicated significantly greater tolerance for polygamists than did those who viewed the negative condition ($M = 3.33, SD = .90$); $F(2, 71) = 3.45, p < .05$.

H7a-c stated that “Parasocial comparison will be predicted by higher levels of a) cognitive, b) affective, and c) behavioral parasocial processing.” Table 6.10 displays the results of an OLS regression using the different domains of parasocial processing as predictor variables

with parasocial comparison as the outcome variable. All three domains were significant predictors of parasocial comparison, even after accounting for demographic and religiosity differences.

Table 6.7:
Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Students' PSC

Variable	B	SE(B)	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.(<i>p</i>)
Model 1					
Cognitive	.43	.15	.27	2.80	.00***
Affective	.31	.10	.31	3.27	.00***
Behavioral	.23	.09	.23	2.55	.01**
Model 2					
Cognitive	.40	.16	.25	2.44	.02**
Affective	.36	.10	.35	3.55	.00***
Behavioral	.25	.10	.25	2.62	.01***
Gender	-.68	.43	-.15	-1.60	.11
Age	.00	.13	.00	.03	.97
Income	-.20	.33	-.06	-.60	.55
White/Not	.30	.35	.08	.84	.40
Education	.10	.08	.12	1.16	.25
Religiosity	.07	.10	.06	.67	.50

p* < .10; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01; *R*² = .30, .34

RQ4 asked, “Which items in the parasocial processing scale are most-associated with social (both upward and downward) comparison?” To explore this question, an OLS regression was performed using all of the parasocial items from the cognitive, affective, and behavioral scales while treating the parasocial comparison index as a dependent variable (see Appendix E). The following table displays the results of the regression:

Table 6.8
Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Parasocial Comparison

Variable	B	SE(B)	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.(<i>p</i>)
Attention Allocation	.08	.10	.08	.74	.46
Comp. of Persona/Actions	.08	.09	.09	.84	.40
Prior Experience Activation	.01	.09	.01	.09	.93
Eval. of Persona/Actions	-.03	.13	-.02	-.22	.83
Anticipatory Observation	-.06	.10	-.06	-.54	.59
Rel. Between Self/Persona	.36	.11	.37	3.31	.00***
Sympathy/Antipathy	-.03	.11	-.03	-.26	.80
Empathy/Counter Empathy	.24	.12	.25	2.05	.04**
Emotion Contagion	.17	.10	.19	1.76	.08*
Nonverbal Behavior	-.06	.09	-.06	-.63	.53
Paraverbal Behavior	.08	.11	.08	.73	.47
Behavioral Intentions	.17	.10	.21	1.79	.08*

p* < .10; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01; *R*² = .40

From the cognitive, affective, and behavioral subsets of parasocial processing items, the items “Occasionally, I wondered if this character was similar to me or not,” “If this character felt bad, I felt bad as well; if this character felt good, I felt good as well,” “This character left me rather sober and unaffected,” and “Sometimes I felt like speaking out to this character” emerged as the items that significantly and positively predicted parasocial comparison.

Additional OLS regressions were run for the downward comparison measures as well as the upward comparison measures. Tables 6.8 and 6.9 present the results (see Appendix E).

“I kept asking myself how things would evolve around this character,” “Occasionally I wondered if this character was similar to me or not,” and “Sometimes I felt like speaking out to this character” emerged as positive predictors of downward parasocial comparison. The items

Table 6.9
Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Downward Parasocial Comparison

Variable	B	SE(B)	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.(<i>p</i>)
Attention Allocation	-.01	.07	-.03	-.21	.84
Comp. of Persona/Actions	.04	.07	.08	.49	.62
Prior Experience Activation	-.05	.07	-.14	-.75	.46
Eval. of Persona/Actions	-.14	.10	-.23	-1.44	.16
Anticipatory Observation	.18	.07	.36	2.59	.01**
Rel. Between Self/Persona	.15	.07	.36	2.20	.03**
Sympathy/Antipathy	-.22	.08	-.55	-2.86	.00***
Empathy/Counter Empathy	.11	.08	.24	1.31	.20
Emotion Contagion	.06	.06	.14	1.01	.32
Nonverbal Behavior	-.17	.07	-.32	-2.44	.02**
Paraverbal Behavior	.03	.07	.07	.47	.64
Behavioral Intentions	.11	.06	.28	1.74	.09*

p* < .10; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01; *R*² = .41

“Whatever this character said or did - I kept still” and “Sometimes I really loved this character for what he/she did” proved to be significant negative predictors of downward parasocial comparison.

“I became aware of aspects of this character that I really liked or disliked” emerged as a negative predictor of upward parasocial comparison that approached significance. “This character left me rather sober and unaffected” (which was reverse coded to indicate greater affective experience) approached significance as a positive predictor of upward social comparison.

RQ5 asked, “How is parasocial comparison related to parasocial interaction (behavioral domain of parasocial processing)?” First, parasocial comparison and parasocial interaction are positively and significantly correlated ($r = .27, p < .01$). No correlations were found between

Table 6.10
Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Upward Parasocial Comparison

Variable	B	SE(B)	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.(<i>p</i>)
Attention Allocation	.04	.05	.11	.78	.44
Comp. of Persona/Actions	.02	.05	.07	.45	.65
Prior Experience Activation	.04	.05	.14	.80	.43
Eval. of Persona/Actions	-.13	.07	-.31	-1.89	.06*
Anticipatory Observation	-.04	.06	-.10	-.64	.53
Rel. Between Self/Persona	.06	.05	.20	1.26	.21
Sympathy/Antipathy	-.03	.05	-.11	-.61	.55
Empathy/Counter Empathy	.07	.06	.22	1.33	.19
Emotion Contagion	.10	.05	.28	1.99	.05*
Nonverbal Behavior	-.03	.05	-.09	-.63	.53
Paraverbal Behavior	.08	.05	.24	1.50	.14
Behavioral Intentions	-.06	.05	-.22	-1.32	.19

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; $R^2 = .33$

parasocial comparison and directional comparison (upward/downward). Second, a paired-samples t-test demonstrated that subjects, upon viewing the experimental episodes, engaged in much more downward comparison ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.04$) with the characters than upward comparison ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .78$), $t(99) = 5.49$; $p < .01$.

RQ6 asked, “Does viewing mixed portrayals of polygamists result in a change in attitudes toward polygamists?” A series of paired-samples t-tests examining the before and after tolerance scores among only those participants who viewed the stimuli were performed. Participants’ ATP scores ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.07$) dropped significantly after viewing the mixed segment ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.25$); $t(23) = 2.91$, $p < .01$.

Participants who viewed the positive condition had slight increases in ATP scores ($M=4.10$, $SD = 1.09$) over their initial ATP scores ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .92$), though this increase was not significant $t(23) = -.90$, $p = \text{n.s.}$ Finally the control group’s initial ATP scores ($M = 3.70$, SD

= 1.20) showed no significant change after viewing the control stimulus ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.11$); $t(22) = .267$, $p = \text{n.s.}$.

To explore the effects of the experimental conditions more thoroughly, further analysis included a 4 (Main Character) X 2 (ATP Before/After) repeated measures ANOVA, in which ATP was treated as the dependent variable. Because the ATP measures were only of two levels (before/after), assessing sphericity was not an issue (Mauchley's $w = 1.00$; $X^2 = .00$; $df = 0$), and therefore we can assume that the displayed omnibus F-test is accurate (Field, 2012). When examining the within subjects effects, the F value indicated that there were significant differences in how people answered ATP questions after viewing segments $F(1, 89) = 4.43$, $p < .05$. A significant interaction effect of the Main Character and the post-test condition also emerged $F(3, 89) = 3.64$, $p < .05$. In other words, seeing the stimulus material led to significant changes in one's attitudes toward polygamists. Where were these changes?

Recall that participants in the experiment had to answer a pre-test survey. In this second round of measuring ATP scores, and after seeing the mixed and negative conditions, attitudes toward polygamists dropped. Participants who saw the mixed condition ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.25$) initially scored higher in their ATPs ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.07$). Similarly, people who saw the negative condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = .88$) also had higher opinions of polygamists ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .71$) before viewing the segment. On the other hand, those exposed to the positive condition ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.09$) had higher opinions of polygamists after viewing the episode than they did before ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .92$). Those in the control group demonstrated a negligible change in their before ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.20$) and after ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.11$) ATP scores $F(3, 89) = 4.43$, $p < .05$.

Table 6.11:
Repeated Measures ANOVA for Character Influence on Tolerance

<u>Variable</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>Hypothesis df</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>Partial η^2</u>
ATP	1.23	4.43	1.23	1	.04**	.05
ATP*CHARACTER	3.04	3.64	1.02	3	.02**	.11
Error ATP	24.78		.28	89		

** $p < .05$

RQ7 asked, “How do men and women differ in their attitudes toward 1) male and 2) female polygamists?” Men ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.36$) had significantly higher scores than women ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.07$) regarding attitudes toward female polygamists $t(97) = 3.28$, $p < .01$. Men who participated in the experiment ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .76$) also had significantly higher scores than female participants ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .51$) regarding attitudes toward male polygamists $t(97) = 3.98$, $p < .01$. Finally, men who participated in the experiment ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.40$) demonstrated significantly better attitudes than women ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.00$) toward both male and female polygamists $t(97) = 3.80$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

Parasocial Contact and Tolerance

The results of this experiment, to a great extent, were in line with Schiappa, et al.’s (2005) parasocial contact hypothesis. Participants exposed to a positive portrayal of a polygamist indicated greater acceptance of polygamy while people exposed to a negative portrayal of a polygamist indicated less acceptance of polygamy. Meanwhile, people exposed to a mixed condition had significant drops in their attitudes toward polygamists after viewing the episode. Though the results approached significance, I failed to reject the nulls.

Why would the findings in the mixed condition only approach significance? Schiappa et al. (2005) found much stronger results when exposing their participants to homosexual and

transgendered-themed shows. These authors, however, used multiple episodes over the course of a semester. It is quite likely that repeated parasocial contacts produces much clearer results and helps form stronger or more “crystalline” attitudes than a single viewing, as was the case in the study at hand. Regardless, the data in this study demonstrated that viewing a positive character raised scores regarding attitudes toward polygamists, and viewing either a negative or a mixed character lowered them.

Viewing the mixed segment also resulted in a significant drop in ATP scores. With the data in this experiment, it is difficult to tell exactly why the mixed group’s ATP scores dropped so dramatically, but I offer two plausible explanations. First, recall that the level of “mixedness” was significant in the manipulation check. Perhaps viewing mixed (positive and negative) episodes is indeed more likely to have a negative effect on tolerance of the characters. Characters in a mixed episode may be less transparent, have unfavorable or misunderstood motives, or have positive motives while engaging in bad behavior. In the mixed episode in this study, the main character (Nikki) commits some heinous acts (i.e. pushing her father down the stairs, engaging in espionage) but her motives are arguably very positive (protecting her husband, sister wives, and children). Such unclear information leaves a viewer with unreduced uncertainty, and we know that uncertainty reduction may be a specific television use, as it links cognition with affect (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Therefore, it is likely that being a “mixed” character (without being an anti-hero) could be worse than being an overtly evil character, due to the nebulous and conflicting information such characters may present.

Another possible explanation is that the mixed episode -- despite extensive manipulation checks -- was simply remembered by the participants as more negative than positive. The final scene jumps between a backyard baptism in which the main family comes together, and the

murder of a disliked patriarch. Conventional wisdom suggests that we tend to remember bad things better than good things. On top of this, research in the advertising field points to the idea that we tend to remember the first and last things we are told, while forgetting the things we are told in between. Recency theory would explain greater salience of a negative valence (*Recency Theory*, ¶ 1).

This study does not provide a single, clear answer to how viewing mixed characters affects tolerance toward their groups, but the posited explanations for the results should be considered when dealing with future “mixed” conditions in experiments. The ending of a “mixed” episode used in an experiment will likely determine how the entire episode of thought of in retrospect, and if it is mixed or negative, will likely result in scores in a dependent variable that reflect it. “Mixedness” should also be free of any uncertainties regarding motives, as uncertainty about a character, as in the case of this study, may lead to a negative perception by the audience.

It does, however, demonstrate that portrayals of characters or groups have an effect on our attitudes toward them. Schiappa et al. (2005) demonstrated this with homosexual and transgendered television characters; the study at hand demonstrates this with polygamous characters. With this in mind, we can firmly say that parasocial contact has a profound impact on shaping our attitudes toward those whom we consider to be different from ourselves. Future research should look at other marginalized groups (i.e. “little people,” “special people,” and others), their portrayals in television shows, and how such portrayals may affect the attitudes held toward them by “normal” people. It is likely results similar to those of Schiappa, et al. (2005) and the study at hand will be found.

Parasocial Comparison and Parasocial Processing

This study also found that higher levels of parasocial comparison were strongly predicted by all three domains, even when accounting for demographic and religiosity differences. Social comparison is known to produce cognitive (e.g. Festinger, 1954; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) and affective (Buunk, et al., 1990) results. The data in this study demonstrate a significant relationship between all domains of parasocial processing and parasocial comparison. This finding lends further argument that parasocial comparison certainly has a place in the parasocial processing model proposed by Hartmann & Schramm (2008) and Schramm & Wirth (2010). It is also clearly associated with other cognitive processes, which may include comprehending a persona's action and situation, activation of prior media and life experiences, and evaluations of a persona and the persona's actions. Future studies should consider the parasocial comparison process when assessing audience responses to personae so as to offer a broader cognitive picture of what happens when we watch television characters.

How is directional parasocial comparison related to parasocial processing? The results of this study leave us with the clear finding that upward parasocial comparison is associated with cognitive parasocial processing. From a theoretical standpoint this makes sense: upward comparison with others is strongly associated with identification with others (Buunk, et al., 2005), which is very much a cognitive process. Identification involves imagining how results experienced by others will be or could be applied in our own lives (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). Moreover, Eyal & Rubin (2003) linked parasocial interaction with identification and homophily - a sense of "sameness" regarding another person. With downward parasocial comparison, we see the opposite. Rather than identification and homophily, we see divergence.

According to Buunk, et al. (2005), while upward social comparison is associated with stronger identification with the target of the comparison, downward social comparison is associated with weaker affective consequences and. It's easier to look down on people when one takes the emotional consequences of one's unfavorable judgments of others out of the equation. There are several plausible explanations for the lack of findings with this hypothesis, with the first perhaps the most plausible.

First, affective parasocial processing may not be the same thing as experiencing affective results of making a social (or parasocial) comparison. The wording of the affective parasocial processing questions can be summed up as "I liked/disliked this character, I felt the way the character felt, and I was affected in some emotional way by the main character." Arguably, these affective experiences are very different from experiencing a sense of feeling lucky, grateful, fearful, or anxious, as the ARSC scale measures in regard to downward comparison. Though participants reported engaging in downward comparison, the results appear to be independent of parasocial processing.

Second, downward parasocial comparison may simply be unrelated, at least directly, to affective parasocial processing. In the social/parasocial comparison process, a person assembles a set of cues about another person or group, and compares them with similar aspects of oneself in order to make a judgment of the other. The affective part of parasocial processing is, in essence, a process of affectively identifying with a character. It is possible that both of these processes can operate simultaneously and independently of each other, with parasocial processing bringing a person affectively closer to a character and the parasocial comparison process assembling differences in order to distance oneself from a character, particularly if the comparison process is downward.

Finally, the concept of directional comparison may have been inadequately measured and the scale inadequately constructed. While the ARSC scale provides well-tested and relevant measures, one of the limits of using it verbatim to measure direction is that only four affective consequences (lucky, grateful, fearful, anxious) have been extensively tested (see Buunk, et al., 1990) in relation to downward comparison. In constructing a scale that measures the frequency of which one experiences specific emotions as results of social comparison, invariably other emotions will be left out, leaving one with an incomplete picture of the phenomenon.

While we can isolate the relationship between directional comparison and parasocial processing, this study found no clear relationship between directional parasocial comparison and attitudes toward polygamy. We do know, however, that affective parasocial processing, rather than along the cognitive domain, was positively related to tolerance for polygamists. Why might this be? To answer this, we must look briefly at stereotyping.

This dissertation, though rooted in the psychologies of social comparison and parasocial phenomena through its theory and methods, also lends explanations of its findings to the body of literature that explores stereotype formation, reinforcement, erosion, and the consequences of holding stereotypes. Some researchers (i.e. Oliver, 1999; Stangor & Schaller, 1996; Tan, Dalisay, Zhang, Han, & Merchant, M.M., 2010) have approached these same questions of media influence on tolerance and observed findings similar to those in this dissertation. Indeed, the literature on media stereotypes may also offer additional explanations for the same media effects observed in this dissertation. What is a stereotype?

Stereotypes are generally defined as fixed conceptions of something or someone that persist. To some extent, we all hold stereotypes of other people. As Lippmann (1922) tells us, "... to see all things freshly and in detail, rather than as types and generalities, is exhausting, and

among busy affairs practically out of the question” (p. 59). Stereotyping people and things -- and giving them various attributions -- is a normal function that assists us in processing information. Using stereotypes frees up cognitive resources for other activities (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Where do our stereotypes come from?

Many come from various media rather than personal experience. Television personae in American programming often shape or reinforce the existing racial, ethnic, and/or gender stereotypes held by audiences (Oliver, 1999; Tan, Dalisay, Zhang, Han, & Merchant, M.M., 2010). For example, Muslims are often portrayed as angry or even violent people (e.g. Said, 2001), particularly since 9/11 (Jackson, 2010). Black men are often portrayed as criminals (e.g. Holt, 2013). Frequency of exposure, and, as is the case of the experimental portion of this dissertation, the valence (positive, negative, neutral, or other) of information are generally the key variables explored in theories of stereotype formation (Stangor & Schaller, 1996).

As mentioned elsewhere in this work, there are only an estimated 30,000-50,000 people in the U.S. currently practicing polygamy (*Polygamy in America*, 2010). It is unlikely that most Americans have any sort of contact with polygamists, yet we hold stereotypes of the practice and the individuals living such a lifestyle. Such stereotypes may include religious extremism, child and spousal abuse, poverty, closed communities, and, as Nielsen & Cragun (2006) argued, ideas of unusual sexual arrangements among spouses. When considering the findings of this dissertation and additional literature on the topic, it is clear that our stereotypes of polygamists are formed and reinforced as results of mediated contact with polygamy. Parasocial social comparison and parasocial processing, as I have demonstrated, are key information processes that influence how we view people different from ourselves.

We also saw strong correlations between affective and cognitive parasocial processing with attitudes toward polygamists. Affective parasocial processing was moderately, positively, and significantly correlated with attitudes toward polygamists. Considering the original pre-test ATP scores and Schiappa, et al.'s (2005) theoretical work on the parasocial contact hypothesis, the data demonstrate that the affective aspect of parasocial processing was a causal agent behind any increases in tolerance of polygamy. This implies a central processing route rather than a heuristic route. In other words, when people use the stereotypes they hold for polygamists, affective processing is bypassed, and tolerance does not change.

Polygamy as a practice in society is likely beyond the viewer's ability to change. A viewer may admire a polygamist family for having greater resources and family interaction, but this does not change a viewer's other attitudes toward them, which may be more salient than matters of money and family. In previous chapters we have discussed the American habit of sexualizing polygamy. Arrangements involving multiple partners would violate current religious taboos, and the sample in this experiment demonstrated strong religiosity. In Chapter 4, interviews revealed that the women did not like the idea of sharing a husband with other women; some assumed a polygamous woman would suffer from low self-esteem or other "problems" that might lead her to such a marital arrangement. Other attitudes toward polygamists may even be shaped by polygamist habits of voting in blocks, as dictated by the patriarch (Zeitzen, 2004) rather than individual women. Such unified voting may be seen as compulsory, rather than a reflection of individual freedom to choose. In summary, however, the people in this sample may have had many different reasons to be averse to polygamy; the reasons for upward comparison with polygamous characters exhibited in this study simply were not enough to change existing beliefs and attitudes toward them.

Parasocial Comparison and Parasocial Processing Scales

This study also looked at those items in the parasocial processing scale that were most-associated with social (both upward and downward) comparison. From the cognitive and affective subsets of parasocial processing items, the items “Occasionally, I wondered if this character was similar to me or not,” and “If this character felt bad, I felt bad as well; if this character felt good, I felt good as well,” proved to be significant positive predictors of parasocial comparison. From the affective and behavioral domains of parasocial processing, “This character left me rather sober and unaffected,” (reverse-coded) and “Sometimes I felt like speaking out to this character” also positively predicted parasocial comparison, though they demonstrated only marginal significance.

The very nature of the first two questions points to parasocial comparison. The first significant item expresses wondering about one’s similarity with others. This reflects Festinger’s (1954) initial hypothesis that “there exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and abilities” (p. 117). The second item suggests a comparison with the character’s emotions as a result of the action within the episode. The items that approached significance are seemingly less-related to the process of comparing oneself with TV characters. But why do they have some predictive power?

RQ5 asked, “How is parasocial comparison related to parasocial interaction (behavioral domain of parasocial processing)? Directional comparison (upward/downward) was uncorrelated with parasocial interaction, but parasocial comparison was indeed correlated with parasocial interaction. After re-examining the item wording and item correlations, the behavioral parasocial scores were correlated with the parasocial comparison items that indicated comparison via “doing things” rather than comparison with the characters on bases of accomplishment or social

standing. More specifically, both behavioral items were moderately correlated with the items regarding comparing how the main character did things with “... how I do things” and “... how my family and close friends do things.” Going back to the original Horton & Wohl (1956) work, in which audience members are “coached” through a series of responses by a television character, I argue that a behavioral basis for parasocial comparison is more likely to yield behavioral parasocial results such as speaking out to a character or saying something to them on impulse.

Finally, RQ7 asked, “How do men and women differ in their attitudes toward 1) male and 2) female polygamists?” Men, as it turns out, had higher ATP scores toward both male and female polygamists than women, indicating greater tolerance. This is not terribly surprising, as the study at hand focused on polygyny (one man with multiple wives). Had it looked at polyandry (one woman with multiple husbands) it is likely the tolerance scores would have been reversed. Several students mentioned in interviews in Chapter 4 that they would not want to have to share their husbands with other women. Findings in Chapter 5 showed that being female was associated with low regard for polygamy in two very different samples. By default, polygyny demands the sharing of attention and affection of a polygamous woman’s spouse with other women. The study at hand offers additional confirmation of what may seem common sense: many women don’t like the idea of polygamy.

Conclusion

In this chapter I conducted an experiment to demonstrate a causal link between the tone of portrayal of polygamists and participants’ resulting attitudes, explore the role of parasocial comparison in parasocial processing, and examine the roles of parasocial comparison and parasocial processing regarding attitudes toward polygamists. The data clearly demonstrate

support for the parasocial contact hypothesis: people who viewed positive portrayals of polygamists had better attitudes toward polygamists than those who viewed negative and mixed portrayals. Parasocial comparison was strongly predicted by all three domains of parasocial processing (cognitive, affective, and behavioral). Data also showed that affective parasocial processing is different from experiencing affective results of parasocial comparison, while direction of parasocial comparison was irrelevant. Affective processing, however, is strongly associated with both downward parasocial comparison and changes in attitudes toward polygamy. Finally, this study added additional support to the idea that being female is associated with a strong, negative effect on one's attitudes toward polygamy.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

This dissertation used three separate studies to explore mediated message processing through the topic of public opinion of polygamy. All three studies in this dissertation addressed perceptions of polygamous characters in television programs in very different ways. Social comparison, parasocial processing, and attitudes toward polygamists are the three key areas in which this dissertation contributes scientific knowledge. As I explored these areas, it also became apparent that there is some overlap and confirmation of these results within the literature on stereotyping. Participants relied on existing stereotypes of polygamists in their parasocial experiences, and processing (particularly along the affective domain) diminished. The literature on stereotyping is well-established, and this dissertation further contributes to our knowledge of media effects by linking stereotyping with the study of social comparison and parasocial processing.

An additional area in which it contributes knowledge is in gender differences in attitudes toward polygamists. Though each of the previous chapters included brief discussion sections, in the following section I will attempt to place the findings within the context of each other and the pertinent literature. Most importantly, these studies of attitudes toward polygamy offer support for the greater media effect described by Schiappa et al.'s (2005) parasocial contact hypothesis. Seeing people or groups somehow categorically different from us on television has a profound influence on our real-life attitudes toward such people and groups.

Parasocial Contact and Processing

I collected data on parasocial processing through qualitative interviews and an experiment. The findings from the qualitative interviews made it clear that upon viewing polygamy-themed TV shows, respondents experienced activation of previous life and mediated experiences, evaluated the personae, and constructed relations between themselves and the personae (see Hartmann & Schramm, 2008; Schramm & Wirth, 2010). Moreover, the respondents indicated a good deal of parasocial comparison with television polygamists.

The experiment divided parasocial processing into cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, and looked for ties with both parasocial comparison-type behaviors as well as attitudes toward polygamists after viewing polygamists in the family drama *Big Love*. Several findings emerged as noteworthy. First, people exposed to negative and mixed episodes showed a decrease in positive attitudes toward polygamy while those who viewed the positive condition showed a slight increase. This study also made it clear that affective results (such as those in social/parasocial comparison) are a distinct concept from affective parasocial processing. Moreover, affective parasocial processing is related to our attitudes toward people we see on TV (and those whom they represent). In this study, affective processing was positively associated with increased tolerance for polygamy. Often, however, we rely on existing stereotypes, which tend to thwart affective processing. Cognitive parasocial processing, as the data demonstrated, was related to upward parasocial comparison, and upward comparison, as we know from previous work, is associated with identification with others (Buunk, et al., 2005).

Finally, several findings tie parasocial comparison directly to parasocial processing. First, all three domains of parasocial processing (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) are significant predictors of parasocial comparison. I hesitate to claim a direction of influence in this finding, as

parasocial comparison could just as easily predict all three domains of processing. Second, a few of the parasocial processing items appear to tap comparison processes, though Schramm & Hartmann (2008) use very different terminology (i.e. “empathy/counterempathy, activation of prior media and life experience) to describe them. Third, upward comparison was associated with cognitive parasocial processing

The takeaway here is that in the studies at hand, parasocial comparison was a distinct cognitive process, strongly associated with all three types of parasocial processing, and is a key aspect of cognitive parasocial processing that has largely gone overlooked in recent parasocial work (i.e. Schramm & Hartmann, 2008; Schramm & Wirth, 2010). Future studies should strongly consider including a greater variety of parasocial comparison items when measuring parasocial processing. It appears that some of the existing measures in Schramm & Wirth’s (2010) model tap some characteristics of parasocial comparison, but they certainly do not address directional comparison. As this dissertation shows, upward comparison is strongly related to cognitive parasocial processing while downward comparison leads to divergence and diminished parasocial processing. The following section examines the parasocial comparison findings in greater detail.

Parasocial Comparison

“Downward” and “Divergent” best-describe the parasocial comparison process pertaining to polygamous characters, as interviews and experimental data suggest. The qualitative work in this dissertation demonstrated that social comparison occurs as a cognitive activity associated with the activation of prior media and life experiences. Though Hartmann & Schramm (2008) suggested that social comparison could occur during parasocial processing, this dissertation is the first known study to provide solid data that this is indeed the case. Students often compared

their relationships with their own families with those they saw among polygamists in television shows, particularly *Sister Wives*, and assessed the characters through the lenses of their own upbringings and familial relationships. Because all of the participants in the qualitative study were from monogamous or monogamous-like households, TV polygamist households proved to be so different that a sense of divergence emerged as one of the predominant themes.

The survey also explored the affective results of social comparison. Viewers of polygamy were more likely than students to experience positive affective states as results of parasocial comparison with polygamists. Parasocial comparison, however, did not predict attitudes toward polygamists (nor did exposure to polygamists on TV). The subsequent experiment took a deeper look at parasocial comparison, accounting for other cognitive processes that occur simultaneously.

Experimental data demonstrated that parasocial comparison is strongly tied in with parasocial processing across the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. Upward comparison with television characters was associated with greater cognitive parasocial processing, which is indicative of, as the work of Buunk, et al. (2005) suggests, some degree of identification with the character.

This type of identification, given the topic of polygamy, is not likely to be the wishful identification, as explored by Chory-Assad & Yanen (2005) and Tian & Hoffner (2010). Rather, it is more akin to the homophily, or “perceived sameness” we see in Eyal & Rubin’s (2003) work. This is an important distinction to make, as viewers may be less likely to wishfully identify with certain people or groups, particularly ones who live a lifestyle generally considered taboo. It is through developing a sense of homophily that attitudes toward groups may improve

and just as likely that a lack of homophily will lead to greater divergence in comparison and more negative attitudes toward the group.

In light of this, the logical conclusion is that positive portrayals with which people feel motivated to upwardly compare themselves benefits a group's image. Upward parasocial comparison is clearly associated with greater processing of mediated cues and less subject to negative and likely persistent affective consequences. Affective processing, as opposed to affective states experienced as results of parasocial comparison, is also associated with upward parasocial comparison, and a key to changes in tolerance as results of viewing mediated personae. We might say "affective identification" affects our tolerance. When we do not affectively "identify" with such characters through such subprocesses as empathy and sympathy, it is likely the result of stereotyping. Affective processing then takes a peripheral route, leaving our tolerance for polygamy unaffected. Regardless, it is through processing the portrayal of the individual characters that existing preconceptions of the group may erode (see Rothbart & John, 1985) and give way to reformed opinions, whether those opinions may be positive, negative, or simply different from the original opinions.

Polygamy

The qualitative study took a phenomenological approach to explore student experiences with television polygamists. It examined how those experiences involved parasocial comparison and its affective results and explored how directional parasocial comparison is related to parasocial processing. One of the main themes that emerged was "polygamy as a lifestyle choice." Many respondents indicated that they respected polygamy as a lifestyle choice, although one they would never pursue themselves. The dominant theme of the study, however, was divergence: downward comparison with polygamist TV characters inevitably led to a sense of

divergence, and often led to changing the channel or continuing to watch out of curiosity rather than as a result of any real connection with the characters.

The survey examined differences in attitudes toward polygamy held by viewers of polygamy shows and Manship School students. Not surprisingly, the sample dubbed “viewers” had much more experience with a variety of polygamy shows than did the students. One of the surprising findings was that there were no positive predictors of positive attitudes toward polygamists within either sample. Being female was the only negative predictor shared by both student and viewer samples. Additional findings of interest included religiosity among students as a significant and negative predictor of tolerance, with knowing polygamists personally and education being significant and negative predictors of ATP scores among viewers.

Arguably, the most notable findings in this dissertation regarding polygamy came from the experimental study. Despite some issues with the mixed condition, the bottom line is this: among respondents in the study, viewing an episode that painted a polygamist in an unfavorable light led to worse attitudes toward polygamists while viewing an episode that painted a polygamist in a favorable light led to more positive attitudes toward polygamists. This is not only consistent with, but the very heart of Schiappa et al.’s (2005) parasocial contact hypothesis. Our attitudes toward and tolerance of underrepresented groups in society can be shaped by the representations of them that we see on television. More favorable representations lead to more favorable regard while unfavorable representations lead to unfavorable regard.

Another important finding in the experiment involved responses to the mixed condition. The mixed condition, as the data showed, led to attitudes toward polygamists that were more negative even than those that resulted from viewing a negative portrayal of polygamists. This is quite noteworthy and explained by the concept of uncertainty reduction. Perse & Rubin (1989)

argue that we actively seek information to reduce uncertainty to feel better about our relationships. Relationships, even parasocial ones, develop as viewers reduce their uncertainty about another person's behavior, thoughts, feelings, etc. Uncertainty reduction strategies are either active, passive, or interactive. "Mediated relationships are characterized by passive uncertainty reduction strategies, such as watching personalities on television, and active strategies, such as talking about personalities with others" (p. 62). Therefore, watching TV may be motivated by a desire to reduce uncertainty about social behavior. With a character displaying a mix of positive and negative attributes and behaviors, a viewer is left with a sense of uncertainty, which as the data have demonstrated, may be viewed as more negative than consistent, overt negative portrayal.

Conclusion

Americans and Polygamy

Schiappa, et al. (2005) demonstrated that television shows that positively portray underrepresented groups and lifestyles make a difference in how those groups and lifestyles are viewed by the American public. In their exploration of the parasocial contact hypothesis, they found strong evidence that viewing shows featuring gay, lesbian, and transgendered characters increased tolerance for such groups and individuals. Almost a decade later, we are living in a very different world, and it is likely that our world today -- at least as pertains to our attitudes toward diversity of lifestyles -- has been shaped by television shows such as *Will and Grace*, *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy*, and other programs featuring openly gay characters.

During the course of writing this dissertation, marriage equality became a hot-button issue in both the news media and entertainment. On June 26, 2013 the Supreme Court of the

United States ruled unconstitutional the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). DOMA defines marriage:

In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word "marriage" means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word "spouse" refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife. (Defense of Marriage Act, 1996).

According to Gacek (2013), "The Defense of Marriage Act also affirms the power of each state to make its own decision as to whether it will accept or reject same-sex marriages created in other jurisdictions" (§ 7). In addition to declaring DOMA unconstitutional, the Supreme Court also struck down California's amendment to ban same-sex marriage, Proposition 8 (Vorwerck, 28-Jun., 2013). These Supreme Court rulings have been hailed as important steps toward granting the same civil rights to people in same-sex relationships that have been enjoyed by those in opposite-sex marriages. Companies such as Apple, Starbuck's, Gap, Google, eBay, Facebook, Levi-Strauss, Nike, and many more immediately expressed their support for the decisions (*27 Companies...*, 26-Jun, 2013). Based on a variety of state polls, public opinion is predicted to continue in support of marriage equality (Miles, 2013) in same-sex unions. Can we say the same for polygamy?

Considering the findings in this dissertation, I would have to answer no -- not at this time. Polygamy as a lifestyle choice continues to carry a "freak factor," hence its continuing popularity as a topic in television entertainment. Moreover, polygamists are an extremely small minority; there are far fewer people involved in polygamy in the United States than there are people involved in same-sex relationships. As a result, and according to Drexel University law professor David Cohen, "There is no political movement in this country that is anywhere near making the same gains for polygamy that have been made for gay marriage" (Vorwerck, 28-Jun, 2013). However, should polygamous entertainment follow a pattern similar to the one we have seen in

entertainment with homosexual characters, it is possible that with the DOMA ruling, positive shows about polygamy, and increased political activism, we may see greater acceptance of the practice in the not-too-distant future. Television shows, in particular, have the ability to help people reduce their uncertainties about such lifestyle practices, and as Colson & George (2011) put it, “making what was once marginalized and tolerated seem normal and mainstream by calling into question the very idea of norms” (p. 70).

In May of 2013 yet another show on polygamy, *Polygamy, USA*, debuted on the National Geographic Channel (Cawley, 19-May, 2013). We should not view this new show as “the show” that will change American opinions of polygamy, however when placed within the entertainment media landscape with *Big Love*, *Sister Wives*, *Love Times Three*, and others, we see a greater magnitude of the general image of polygamy as an acceptable and normal lifestyle. The producers of *Polygamy, USA* are clearly aware of the power of positive portrayals of underrepresented groups in television. Cawley (19-May, 2013) states that:

We realize that, to overcome stereotypes associated with the activities in Colorado City and general attitudes toward practicing plural marriage, something must be done to portray the people of Centennial Park in an open and close-up manner that will demonstrate the common humanness we all have as productive and respectable citizens of our communities. The hope is that people will realize that our living plural marriage is not the stereotype envisioned by people at large; it is based on a sincere religious belief, held in combination with all the moral principles of any devout Christian community. There is a general misconception that men among the community look to plural marriage as a means to satisfy their lust and exploit and degrade women. It is this stereotype that we would like to dispel by showing the contrary to the general public. If sufficient public opinion is changed, it may be possible to decriminalize the practice, allowing polygamists to participate more freely in society.

The program put together for the National Geographic Channel seeks to fulfill this role in portraying Centennial Park. Other television programs have aimed at more sensational (and often misrepresentative) aspects of life in plural marriage, at best a half-truth about the lifestyle, although their presentations have had no influence on the decision to open up Centennial Park for this program. Naturally, there is a concern in many minds about how the people of Centennial Park will be perceived by viewers of the program, but it seems worth the effort at least to portray their humanness. Hopefully, viewers will take away the perceptions that inhabitants of Centennial Park are every bit as worthwhile and respectable citizens in our society as any others; that they are not immoral; and that they live lives as upright and praiseworthy as any other people. (§ 4-5)

Americans and Tolerance Through Parasocial Contact

Mass media are keys to how most people form ideas about minority groups (Allport, 1954). Americans are not yet ready to accept polygamy as a legitimate lifestyle choice. Parasocial contact, as I have demonstrated with polygamists in this dissertation, has the ability to change people's attitudes toward other groups in society. As Rothbart & John (1985) argued, the process of such attitude change occurs as attributes for members of a group end up modifying a person's conceptualization of the category of the group. Changing the attributes of the portrayals of the polygamists in the experimental stimuli did indeed modify the perceptions the participants held for polygamists.

The implications of such a media effect are profound. We see television characters, compare ourselves with them, form various judgments, experience various affective states as results of those judgments, and exit the experience with opinions not only of the character, but the social group (or groups) that the character represents. The portrayals of the characters themselves has the unique ability to reshape how we think about the group, changing or confirming the stereotypes and ideas that we had about their particular social group to begin with. Such change may occur for the better, as in the case of positive portrayals, or may occur for the worse, as in negative and mixed portrayals. In light of this effect, it is in the best interest of various social groups to find ways to insure positive portrayals in entertainment programming.

This certainly is not a new idea, but in this dissertation I have demonstrated that it remains an important idea.

In light of this, I argue that it is important for different groups to be aware of their portrayals in popular entertainment and take some sort of action when they find themselves portrayed as undesirable. Some groups, such as Scientologists may have the power to create barriers to production of such fare (*Tom Cruise Angry ...*, 2012). Groups such as those who suffer from mental disabilities may have people protesting negative portrayals on their behalf, as “misportrayal of disabilities often gives viewers a skewed perspective that may have little to do with reality” (Woodward, 1998, ¶ 2). Others, such as prisoners, may have no say in the matter. Regardless, it is important for groups to step up in complain if they feel they have been portrayed in a negative light by entertainment producers. Remaining vigilant and proactive may not fix the immediate problem of having a negative image circulating, but it could shape future portrayals or even how problem materials are perceived when potential viewers are also exposed to the opinions held by beneficiaries of such portrayals.

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APPENDIX A:
PRE-TEST SURVEY

Religion/Religiosity/Experience With Polygamists

- 1) Are you a polygamist?
- 2) Do you know any polygamists personally?
- 3) Are you an atheist?
- 4) Do you consider yourself religious?
- 5) If so, what is your religion?
 - a. Catholic
 - b. Protestant
 - c. Mormon
 - d. Muslim
 - e. Jewish
 - f. Buddhist
 - g. Other _____ (please specify)
- 6) Circle which answer best fits your religious beliefs and behavior. Please answer all questions.

I go to religious service(s) once a ...
never day week month 6 months year 1 2 3 4 5 6

- 7) I would consider myself religious.
Strongly Slightly Slightly Strongly Disagree Disagree Disagree Agree Agree Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6

- 8) I believe in a higher power.
Strongly Slightly Slightly Strongly Disagree Disagree Disagree Agree Agree Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6

- 9) I speak/pray to my higher power once a ...
never day week month 6 months year
1 2 3 4 5 6

- 10) To what extent do you live your life according to your spiritual beliefs.
never seldom some often most always
1 2 3 4 5 6

Propensity Toward Social Comparison (INCOM)

1. I often compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life
2. If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what others think about it
3. I always pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things
4. I often compare how my loved ones (boy or girlfriend, family members, etc.) are doing with how others are doing
5. I always like to know what others in a similar situation would do
6. I am not the type of person who compares often with others
7. If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how

others have done

8. I often try to find out what others think who face similar problems as I face
9. I often like to talk with others about mutual opinions and experiences
10. I never consider my situation in life relative to that of other people
11. I often compare how I am doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with other people

Attitudes toward Polygamists

This derives from Herek's ATLG attitudes and has been adapted for polygamy. (Measured on 7-pt. Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree").

- 1) Female polygamists can't fit into our society.
- 2) Polygamy should NOT be a cause for job discrimination against women in any situation.*
- 3) Polygamist women are detrimental to society because their living arrangements emphasize division between the sexes.
- 4) For female polygamists, state laws concerning polygamy should be loosened. *
- 5) Women involved in polygamy are sinful.
- 6) The growing number of female polygamists indicates a decline in American morals.
- 7) Polygamist women are not the problem, but what society makes of their situations can be a problem.*
- 8) Polygamist women are a threat to our basic institutions.
- 9) For women, polygamy is an inferior form of matrimony.
- 10) Polygamist women are sick.
- 11) Male polygamists should be allowed to adopt children.*
- 12) I think male polygamists are disgusting.
- 13) Male polygamists should not be allowed to teach in schools.
- 14) Polygamy is a perversion for men.
- 15) For male polygamists, involvement in polygamy is a natural expression of desire to have a family.*
- 16) If a man has polyamorous feelings, he should do everything they can to overcome them.
- 17) I would not be too upset if I learned my son was a polygamist.*
- 18) Men practicing polygamy is just plain wrong.
- 19) The idea of men having polygamous marriages seems ridiculous to me.
- 20) Men involved in polygamy is merely another kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned.*

Demographic Questions

- 1) I am ____ M/F.
- 2) I am a ____ (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Graduate Student, Other)
- 3) On my last birthday, I was ____ years old.
- 4) I am ____ (ethnicity).

APPENDIX B:
SURVEY COLLECTORS

Site	Article	<u>N</u>
Social Media	N/A	41
Examiner.com	1) 'Sister Wives' preview: 'The Dark Side of Polygamy' airs tonight 2) 'Sister Wives' spoilers: Episode 404, 'Polygamist Cults' 3) Darger family talks about choice to do 'My Three Wives' special 4) 'Sister Wives' Christine Brown: 'Being a sister wife isn't what I signed up for' 5) Meet the Dargers: 'My Three Wives': Another polygamist family gets a show on TLC 6) 'Sister Wives' officially renewed for season 4 (Photos) 7) 'Sister Wives' Browns heading back to Utah courtroom 8) 'Sister Wives' polygamy lawsuit addressed in federal court	19
Cafemom.com	'Sister Wives' Preview: Major Crazy Jealous Meltdown On the Way!	5
Radaronline	1) Sister Wives Argue Over The Size Of Their Homes, Meri Undecided About More Kids 2) Kody Brown Admits 'It's Not Easy' Being Affectionate In Front Of All His Wives, Jealousy Makes It Difficult	4
TVByTheNumbers	1) My Three Wives Premieres Tonight on TLC	6
Huffington Post	1) 'Sister Wives': The Brown Family Vacations, Clashes With Another Polygamist Family 2) 'Sister Wives': Brown Family Stunned By Warren Jeffs Scandal 3) Mormons Change References To Blacks, Polygamy	95
Crushable.com	1) The Sister Wives Season Finale Teaches Us That Sex is Bad and Kody Brown is Balding 2) My Three Wives Really Gives Entirely Too Much Meaning To The Phrase 'Sister Wives'	1
Salt Lake Tribune	1) Will the 'Sister Wives' show for court? 2) 'Sister Wives' lawsuit coming back to Utah courtroom 3) Utahns speak out against decriminalizing polygamy 4) Alcohol, coffee and why the FLDS drink them	19
Fox 13 SLC	1) Judge contemplates decriminalizing polygamy in "Sister Wives" case	1
Houston Press	1) Reality Bites: Sister Wives	15

APPENDIX C:
ORIGINAL MANIPULATION CHECKS

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the video you just watched (all items measured on 7-point Likert scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

- 1) Overall, this was a very positive portrayal of polygamists.
- 2) The main character was very positive.
- 3) I found the majority of the characters to be very positive.
- 4) I felt the episode had a positive tone.
- 5) This was a mixed (positive and negative) portrayal of polygamists.
- 6) I would describe this episode as "neutral."
- 7) Some aspects of this portrayal were negative while some were positive.
- 8) This episode portrayed a mixture of positive and negative aspects of a polygamist lifestyle

Who was the main character in the video you just watched? (Nicki, Margene, Frank, Other/Specify)

- 1) Sometimes I really loved the main character for what he/she did.
- 2) I felt emotionally affected by the things the main character did in the show.
- 3) If this character felt bad about things, I felt bad as well. If this character felt good about things, I generally felt good as well.
- 4) I find this character to be an intelligent character.
- 5) I find this character to be of good moral character.
- 6) I felt sorry for this character when he/she made a mistake.
- 7) This character made me feel comfortable, as if I was with a friend.
- 8) I see this character as a natural, down-to-earth person.
- 9) I would like to meet this character (not the actor) in real-life if he/she existed.

Open-ended: Do you have any other comments that may help us understand your assessment of whether this episode was a positive, negative, or mixed portrayal of a polygamist lifestyle?

Please enter your MEL number so that you can receive credit.

APPENDIX D:
REVISED MANIPULATION CHECKS

The main character in the episode I just watched was:

- 1) Frank Harlow
- 2) Nicki Grant
- 3) Margene "Marge" Heffman
- 4) Host of a nature show
- 5) Other (Please Specify)

Please indicate how much you agree with the following descriptions of the MAIN CHARACTER in the episode you just watched. (Measured on 7-point scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree)

Hard-Working

Moral

Intelligent

Warm

Good-Natured

Sincere

Untrustworthy

Likeable

Unfriendly

Capable

Loyal

Compassionate

Rebellious

Arrogant

Strong

Charming

Nice

Clever

Brave

Unethical

Honest

Angry

I felt the main character in this episode ... (Measured on 7-point scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Was usually good.

Generally made morally questionable decisions.

Often demonstrated loyalty.

Was unpleasant, more often than not.

Could usually be uncaring.

Rarely showed compassion.

Was usually dishonest.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements regarding the POLYGAMISTS in the episode you just watched. (Measured on 7-point scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree). In general, I found the polygamists in this episode to be...

Hard-Working

Moral

Intelligent

Warm

Good-Natured

Sincere

Untrustworthy

Likeable

Unfriendly

Capable

Loyal

Compassionate

Rebellious

Arrogant

Strong

Charming

Nice

Clever

Brave

Unethical

Honest

Angry

I felt the polygamists in this episode ... (Measured on 7-point scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Were usually good.

Generally made morally questionable decisions.

Often demonstrated loyalty.

Were unpleasant, more often than not.

Could usually be uncaring.

Rarely showed compassion.

Were usually dishonest.

APPENDIX E: POST-TEST

Parasocial Processing (From Schramm & Hartmann, 2008) (Measured on 7-pt. Likert scales ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”).

Cognitive

- Parasocial 1) I carefully followed the behavior of PERSONA.
- Parasocial 2) I hardly thought about why PERSONAE did things he/she did.*
- Parasocial 3) I kept wondering if I knew persons that are similar to PERSONA.
- Parasocial 4) I became aware of aspects of PERSONA that I really liked or disliked.
- Parasocial 5) I kept asking myself how things would evolve around PERSONA.
- Parasocial 6) Occasionally, I wondered if PERSONA was similar to me or not.

Affective

- Parasocial 7) Sometimes I really loved PERSONA for what he/she did.
- Parasocial 8) If PERSONA felt bad, I felt bad as well; if PERSONA felt good, I felt good as well.
- Parasocial 9) PERSONA left me rather sober and unaffected. *

Behavioral

- Parasocial 10) Whatever PERSONA said or did – I kept still.*
- Parasocial 11) Occasionally, I said something to PERSONA on impulse.
- Parasocial 12) Sometimes I felt like speaking out to PERSONA.

Attitudes toward Polygamists

This derives from Herek’s ATLG attitudes and has been adapted for polygamy. (Measured on 7-pt. Likert scales ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”).

- 4) Female polygamists can’t fit into our society.
- 5) Polygamy should NOT be a cause for job discrimination against women in any situation.*
- 6) Polygamist women are detrimental to society because their living arrangements emphasize division between the sexes. THIS ONE IS HIGHLY ADAPTED.
- 7) For female polygamists, state laws concerning polygamy should be loosened. *
- 8) Women involved in polygamy are sinful.
- 9) The growing number of female polygamists indicates a decline in American morals.
- 10) Polygamist women are not the problem, but what society makes of their situations can be a problem.*
- 11) Polygamist women are a threat to our basic institutions.
- 12) For women, polygamy is an inferior form of matrimony.
- 13) Polygamist women are sick.

- 14) Male polygamists should be allowed to adopt children.*
- 15) I think male polygamists are disgusting.
- 16) Male polygamists should not be allowed to teach in schools.
- 17) Polygamy is a perversion for men.
- 18) For male polygamists, involvement in polygamy is a natural expression of desire to have a family.*
- 19) If a man has polyamorous feelings, he should do everything they can to overcome them.
- 20) I would not be too upset if I learned my son was a polygamist.*
- 21) Men practicing polygamy is just plain wrong.
- 22) The idea of men having polygamous marriages seems ridiculous to me.
- 23) Men involved in polygamy is merely another kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned.*

Parasocial Comparison

1. While watching the video, I found myself comparing myself with some of the characters with respect to what I have accomplished in life.
2. I paid attention to how the characters do things and compared them with how I like to do things.
3. I compared how the characters do things with how my family and close friends do things.
4. I compared how the characters dealt with their situations with how I would deal with the same situations if I were in them.
5. I did not compare how the characters do things with how I would do the same things.
6. While watching the video, I compared how the characters were doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with other people with how I am doing socially with others.
7. I think the most compelling characters from the video are not as good at doing things as I am.

Upward/Downward Parasocial Comparison (ARSC)

All items are measured on 4-point scales (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, and 4 = often).

- 1) Please rate the frequency which you felt lucky when watching the main character appear WORSE-OFF than yourself.
- 2) Please rate the frequency which you felt grateful when watching the main character appear WORSE-OFF than yourself.
- 3) Please rate the frequency which you felt fearful when watching the main character appear WORSE-OFF than yourself.
- 4) Please rate the frequency which you felt anxious when watching the main character appear WORSE-OFF than yourself.
- 5) Please rate the frequency which you felt frustrated when watching the main character appear BETTER-OFF than yourself.

- 6) Please rate the frequency which you felt depressed when watching the main character appear BETTER-OFF than yourself.
- 7) Please rate the frequency which you felt inspired when watching the main character appear BETTER-OFF than yourself.
- 8) Please rate the frequency which you felt comforted when watching the main character appear BETTER-OFF than yourself.

APPENDIX F:
STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

I want you to think about the last show you watched that dealt with polygamy.

- 1) How frequently did you feel lucky when watching characters who appear WORSE-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 2) How frequently did you feel grateful when watching characters who appear WORSE-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 3) How frequently did you feel fearful when watching characters who appear WORSE-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 4) How frequently did you feel anxious when watching characters who appear WORSE-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 5) How frequently did you feel frustrated when watching characters who appear BETTER-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 6) How frequently did you feel depressed when watching characters who appear BETTER-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 7) How frequently did you feel inspired when watching characters who appear BETTER-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 8) How frequently did you feel comforted when watching characters who appear BETTER-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 9) What else can you tell me about how you feel in regard to people WORSE-OFF than yourself? Why?
- 10) What else can you tell me about how you feel in regard to people BETTER-OFF than yourself? Why?

APPENDIX G:
STIMULUS DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

Do you recognize this character? Yes/No (Selecting "No" will take you to the next character.)

Please answer the following questions regarding the character in the photo. (1-7; Strongly disagree - Strongly Agree).

3. Sometimes I really loved this character for what he/she did.
4. I felt emotionally affected by the things this character did in the show.
5. If this character felt bad about things, I felt bad as well. If this character felt good about things, I generally felt good as well.
6. I find this character to be a positive character.
7. I find this character to be of good moral character.
8. I find this character to be an intelligent character.
9. I find this character physically attractive.
10. I feel sorry for this character when he/she makes a mistake.
11. This character makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
12. I see this character as a natural, down-to-earth person.
13. I miss seeing this character when he/she is not on television.
14. I would like to meet this character (not the actor) in real-life if he/she existed.

15. Is this character a "good guy," a "bad guy," a "neutral guy" or mixed? Please make additional comments on how you perceive this character so that we may better-understand how you feel about them.

Demographics:

16) I am _____ (Male/Female)

17) On my last birthday, I was _____ years old (Do not spell your age; please enter numerals).

18) I am _____ *Black/African-American White/Caucasian Hispanic Asian Native American
Mixed Other

19) According to my 1011 tax return, I earned about -----

*Less than \$20,000 \$20,000-\$40,000 \$40,000-\$80,000 \$80,000-\$100,000 Over \$100,000

20) Including kindergarten, elementary school, middle school/junior high, high school, and college, I have _____ years of formal education.

Thanks for your participation! If you have any questions or would like to keep up with the findings in the study, please feel free to contact Thomas Phillip Madison at 806-773-0739 or by e-mail at tmadis1@lsu.edu.

As one final question, I would like to get your feedback on this survey. Is there anything you would have asked differently or did you run into any problems that made it difficult to complete the survey?

Thanks again!

APPENDIX H: PRIMING MATERIALS

About Big Love

Big Love is an American television drama that aired on HBO between March 2006 and March 2011. The show is about a fictional fundamentalist Mormon family in Utah that practices polygamy. *Big Love* stars Bill Paxton, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Chloë Sevigny, Ginnifer Goodwin, Amanda Seyfried, Douglas Smith, Bruce Dern, Grace Zabriskie, Harry Dean Stanton, Mary Kay Place, Matt Ross, and Cassi Thomson.

Bill Henrickson (Paxton) has three wives, seven kids, who live in a suburb of Salt Lake City, as well as in-laws who live on a polygamist compound beyond the suburbs. He keeps his wives Barb, Margene and Nicki (Jeanne Tripplehorn, Ginnifer Goodwin and Chloë Sevigny) in adjacent houses, where they run the extended household jointly. He has to keep the arrangement semisecret because polygamy is illegal in Utah and banned by the mainstream Mormon Church, or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

About Margene

In a moment, you will view an episode that revolves around the Big Love Character *Margene Heffman*. Margene is Bill Henrickson's third wife, and his youngest. She was raised by her single mother Ginger in a small town in Colorado. Her father left when Margene was three. Margene's mother later moved to Salt Lake City and brought Margene with her, where Margene attended Catholic school.

Margene graduated high school in Salt Lake and began working for Bill at the Home Plus as a store customer service representative. Bill then hired her to babysit his children. Margene grew close to the family, and soon Bill, Barb and Nicki made Margene into their third sister-wife. Margene is generally easier for Bill to deal with than his other wives: Nicki has been in trouble several times in several ways, and Barb stands up to Bill more.

About Frank

In a moment, you will view an episode that revolves around the Big Love Character *Frank Harlow*. Frank Harlow is married to four women, one of whom is Lois Henrickson, and they live at the Juniper Creek compound. Together Frank and Lois have two sons, Bill Henrickson and Joey Henrickson.

Frank was born to early members of the Juniper Creek compound. Always the type to try and "work" people to his advantage, Frank is often extremely clumsy in his efforts, and his motives are usually transparent to everyone -- including longtime compound leader and prophet Roman Grant. Frank is also not the most nurturing of fathers, still coming down hard on ne'er-do-well son Joey, and is the man responsible for banishing his son Bill from Juniper Creek when he was 14.

About Nicki

In a moment, you will view an episode that revolves around the Big Love Character *Nicki Grant*. Nicki is the daughter of Roman Grant and Bill's second wife. Unlike Bill's other wives, Barb and Margene, Nicki grew up on a polygamist compound outside the Salt Lake City suburbs. Nicki's differences in upbringing often lead to different understandings of how mainstream America works, and often puts her at odds with her sister wives and husband Bill.

Nicki is often harsh and blunt, and then apologizes by saying, "Well that's just the way it/that is." Nicki is also Mrs. Fix It; she can be very independent. She has been seen uninstalling and installing washers and dryers. Nicki retains a strong belief in "the principle" of polygamy, as well as modesty in dress and a deep suspicion of the world at large, outside of the compound. The program has often focused on Nicki's internal conflicts of sexuality, particularly as she regards her mixed loyalties between her father and her husband, who themselves are frequently in conflict.

VITA

Phillip Madison grew up in west Texas and now lives with his wife and daughter in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. His professional experience includes radio production/sales, institutional advancement, fundraising management, and public relations. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Advertising/Spanish from Texas Tech University and later returned to finish a Master of Arts in Mass Communication. In 2008 he entered the Manship School doctoral program at Louisiana State University, and conducted research on media effects as functions of human imagination, with special focus on imagined interactions and parasociability. In his time at LSU he also taught visual communication software, assisted in various research projects, and contributed to the Office of International Services.