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Celebrity versus non-celebrity: parasocial relationships with characters in reality-based television programs

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CELEBRITY VERSES NON-CELEBRITY: PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH
CHARACTERS IN REALITY-BASED TELEVISION PROGRAMS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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By
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my high school guidance counselor Adrinell Dye Washington and my grandfather Richard C. Henry. Your faith in my abilities from a young age pushed me to be the woman and student that I am today. Thank you for all of your patience, guidance and motivation as I was growing up. These great men and the other friends and family I have lost over the years have made me realize how precious and short life is and to make everyday count.

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ABSTRACT

Research of parasocial relationships suggests that audiences engage in one-sided relationships with their favorite personae in the media. This study attempts to explore two types of reality stars: those who had fame before being on reality television and those who have fame because of the show. Using the PSR-Processing Scale, I compared levels of parasocial interactions for each, as well how moral disengagement might play a role for each type of reality star. I also explored whether these parasocial relationships are influenced by the frequency with which respondents watch various types of sub-genres of reality-based programs (i.e. game docs, dating shows, documentary soap operas).   To measure levels of parasocial relationships, moral disengagement, media consumption, and reality television viewing habits, I administered an online survey to 244 students at a large southern university. Results show that respondents' parasocial relationships and degree of moral disengagement with their favorite celebrity and non-celebrity on reality shows are influenced by the type of sub-genres of the reality-based programs (i.e. game docs, dating shows, documentary soap operas).

INTRODUCTION

Although forms of reality television have been around since the 1940s, the concept of watching "real" people act out their daily lives in front of the camera did not gain popularity until the early 1990s with the creation of MTV's *The Real World* (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Orbe, 2008; Ouellette & Murray, 2009). By the start of the new millennium, and with the success of the CBS program *Survivor*, major networks started using reality television programs to fill prime time viewing slots. From 2009 to 2010, nine of the top 20 programs during primetime were reality-based television programs (Dehnart, 2010). Moreover, according to *The New York Times*, 15 of the top 20 rated summer programs in 2010 were reality-based (Carter, 2010).

Reality television can allow an ordinary individual to become a celebrity in the blink of an eye. Horton and Wohl (1956) found interactions with non-fictitious personae on television, such as quizmasters, create the perception in audience members' minds that the people who play themselves are real celebrities. The same phenomenon occurs with reality television. In *The Image*, Daniel J. Boorstin (1961) states, "The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness" (pg. 57). A celebrity "is made by all of us who willingly read about him, who like to see him on television, who buy recordings of his voice, and talk about him to our friends" (Boorstin, 1961, pg. 58). On reality television, unknown personae can become a celebrity not for a certain skill set they posses, but by audiences that are willing to watch their shows and follow them in the media. For example, after the second season of MTV's *Jersey Shore*, Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi wrote a New York Times bestseller and Mike "The Situation" Sorrentino appeared on ABC's *Dancing with the Stars*.

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The interesting dynamic of reality television is that it not only gives the ordinary person fame, but it also allows celebrities to become ordinary. Reality television allows audiences to watch the lives of celebrities in their everyday routines. VH1 began to explore reality-based television featuring celebrities with *The Surreal Life*. One of the original cast members, former Public Enemy member Flavor Flav, went on to star in four additional VH1 reality television shows (*Strange Love* with Bridgitte Neilson and three seasons of *Flavor of Love*), which spawned three spinoffs (*I Love New York*, *Charm School*, and *Rock of Love* featuring Poison front man Brett Michaels) (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008). The popularity of Flavor Flav was enough for the show to shatter previous cable records with 7.5 million viewers tuning into 2006's season two premiere (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008). Since, VH1 has branded an entire block of programming featuring celebrities on its reality shows known as "celebreality" (Orbe, 2008). As of July 2009, only two of VH1's primetime television hours did not consist of celebrity-based reality programming. The more popular of VH1's "celebreality" shows draw in an average of two million viewers regularly (Stelter, 2009). Although some "celebreality" shows can increase a celebrity's fame, these shows allow audiences to get to know them in an unscripted manner that humanizes them.

The appeals of reality television and audience interactions with cast members are similar to that of daytime soap operas. For decades, soap operas have been a popular escape for people from boredom or the drama of their own lives. When introduced to television characters, audiences engage in parasocial interactions common with real-life social interactions that can later turn into relationships (Perse & Rubin, 1998). Soap operas encourage the creation of parasocial relationships with loyal audience members

because of the serial nature of a show (Giles, 2002). Parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships that audience members develop over repeated interactions with their favorite personae in the media. Soap opera fans are most attracted to characters which whom they are able to identify and perceive as real and authentic (Perse & Rubin, 1990). The serial nature of documentary soap operas on reality television provides similar parasocial relationships with their viewers. Just as fans of daytime soap operas have vicariously lived through those characters, fans on reality television now do the same with documentary soap operas on shows such as Gene Simmon's *Family Jewels* and *Keeping with the Kardashians*.

Most reality shows allow audiences to follow the lives of reality characters from week to week. For example, fans watch as contestants compete twice a week on the *X-Factor* to win a singing contract, as the cast of *Jersey Shore* lives together over numerous seasons in different cities and countries, and as overweight contestants fight to lose weight on *The Biggest Loser*. Reality television provides an opportunity for audiences to interact with "real" people, acting their lives out in front of the camera, allowing the show to resemble a real-life soap opera. The storylines in daytime soap operas, however, are the creation of writers, whereas, in reality television, the stories (for the most part) evolve unpredictably during the filming of the show.

Reality-based television programs may be prone to parasocial relationships because cast members reveal raw emotions to the audience during the shows' face-to-face interactions with the camera (Ebersole & Woods, 2007). Although the relationship is one-sided (Horton & Wohl, 1956), audiences begin to feel invested in the relationship with the "real" people on their favorite television programs and begin to care about them and

want to know what will happen next. The Internet assists with these relationships because viewers can go on blogs or websites to find out more about cast members even before the next episode premieres. Reality-based television programs also serve as social currency with friends and peers (Hall, 2009). Being able to discuss a viewers' favorite show and its characters with friends increases the enjoyment for audiences and creates additional motivation to watch a program (Hall, 2009).

The viewers' feelings about the characters on the programs drive audiences' enjoyment from a television show. The writers and producers of television shows use common themes and narratives across different genres to allow the audience to make personal and moral judgments about characters with little personal knowledge about characters when viewers initially interact with a persona. According to Raney (2004) audiences quickly decide if they like or dislike characters on a show. When audiences like a television character, they are able to relax the strict moral codes they apply to people in the real world for the sake of enjoyment. Gratifications through escapism, companionship, pleasure, and emotional connections further motivate viewers to remain morally disengaged with their favorite characters (Raney, 2004). Receiving enjoyment from a television show increases the likelihood viewers will watch the program again and form a parasocial relationship with their favorite characters (Eyal & Fox, 2007).

Beyond filling various needs and gratifications, reality television also influences cultural identity. According to Turner (2005), "Youth audiences are high consumers of celebrity, and celebrity is now a standard by-product of the promotion of the [reality] TV [documentary] soap opera" (p. 418). Audiences expect conflict, sexual adventure and the pleasure of voyeurism when they consume reality television (Turner, 2005). The

implication of the influences of reality television shows combined with viewers' ability to morally disengage during these programs is still unknown (Raney, 2004).

Researchers have only begun to explore the connections between reality television, moral disengagement, and parasocial relationships. As the genre of reality-based television is already widely popular, parasocial relationships and the audience ability to morally disengage concerning their favorite reality stars have yet to be determined. This study attempts to explore two types of reality stars: those who had fame before being on reality television and those who have fame because of the show. Using the PSR-Processing Scale, I compared levels of parasocial interactions for each one to the other, as well how moral disengagement might play a role for each type of reality star. I also explored whether these parasocial relationships are influenced by the frequency with which respondents watch various types of sub-genres of reality-based programs (i.e. game docs, dating shows, documentary soap operas). Specifically, this exploratory research will examine the following questions: (1) Do audiences create stronger parasocial relationships with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?; (2) Does liking the various reality show genres predict the strength of parasocial relationships?; (3) Do audiences morally disengage at a higher rate with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?; and (4) Does liking various genres of the reality-based television program predict moral disengagement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reality Television

Audiences have been attracted to the "real" characters on news programs, talk shows, documentaries, and re-enactment shows on television for decades. People have enjoyed reality-based programs on shows such as *Candid Camera* in the 1940s, *The American Family* in the 1970s, *COPS* in the 1980s, and MTV's *The Real World* in the 1990s. It was not until the early 21st century, however, that reality-based television shows gained mainstream popularity and notoriety with both networks and audiences (Andrejevic, 2002; Leone et al., 2006). In 2000-2001, the ratings surge for reality television shows began with CBS' *Survivor*, Fox's *American Idol* and MTV's *The Osbournes,* which gained record-breaking viewers for all three networks (Ebersole & Woods, 2007).

Unlike early forms of programming featuring "real" people on television such as news programs or talk shows, modern reality-based television programming features non-professional actors in an unscripted program (Andrejevic, 2002; Holbrook & Singer, 2009). Nabi, Biely, Morgan, and Stitt (2003) observed that reality-based television shows are "programs that film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur" (p. 304). The authenticity of reality television is, however, sometimes questionable (Orbe, 2008). Even producers admit that the scenarios or "pseudo-events" (Boorstein, 1961) on most reality television shows are fixed (Andrejevic, 2002) as producers, directors, and editors create a story from the raw footage (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008). Only a fraction of the taped footage will air on the broadcast and anything reality personae say or do could make the final cut (Andrejevic,

2002). Conversely, Dubrofsky and Hardy (2008) suggest that, subconsciously or not, participants act for the camera, depending on the situation, just as people do in their lives when the camera is off.

Despite the success of reality-based programs, academics and others find it challenging to define the genre (Nabi et al. 2003) beyond its "claims to offer a representation of reality" (Holmes, 2004, p. 215). The genre of reality television has evolved into numerous overlapping subgenres, including: hidden camera, competitive shows, crime-related shows, documentary soap operas, and transformative improvements (i.e. *Heavy*, *Extreme Makeover*). Competitive reality shows, which generally involve participants competing for a final prize is always the rating winner when it comes to reality television programs on broadcast networks. Reality documentary soap operas, however, are gaining ground (Carter, 2010). The sub-genre became popular again in 1991 with the premiere of MTV's *The Real World* (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Orbe, 2008; Ouellette & Murray, 2009) and includes shows that focus on following cast members around in their everyday personal lives (i.e. Bravo's *The Real Housewives,* MTV's *Laguna Beach,* BET's *College Hill,* TLC's *Little People Big World*). In the summer of 2010, the second season of MTV's *Jersey Shore* premiered to an audience of 5.3 million viewers (Andreeva, 2010).

The first sub-genre of reality programs to air on television was hidden camera shows. America's oldest reality show, *Candid Camera*, ran from 1948 to 2004 (Bratich, 2006). The show played pranks on unsuspecting people. According to Bratich (2006), the sub-genre of hidden camera program interrupts different aspects of people's everyday lives to not only test people's gullibility, but also their limits. Audiences get to enjoy

seeing unsuspecting subjects' fear (*Fear Factor*), sexual desire (*Women Behaving Badly*), and hospitality (*Damage Control*) levels, and celebrities' tolerance levels (*Punk'd*). Beyond pleasure, Bratich (2006) found that hidden camera shows are also learning tools to test people's tolerance in societal relations. ABC's *What Would You Do?* is a prime example of a show used to expose intolerance and break barriers to discuss the behavior of unsuspecting subjects on hidden camera. On MTV's *Boiling Point,* unaware participants who can maintain calm while being subjected to the intolerable antics of rude/aloof service workers or crazy blind dates win monetary rewards for their patience.

Competitive reality television shows, also known as gamedocs (Ouellette & Murray, 2009), have been popular since the 1950's quiz shows. The rise of competitive reality shows came in 2000 with CBS's *Survivor* and has since taken over the broadcast primetime airwaves (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008). *Survivor* took the idea of having strangers live and work together from *The Real World* and turned the contrived situation into a competitive game show that spanned over the course of months. The suspense of reality game shows proved to be very enjoyable for viewers (Nabi et al., 2006). Competitive reality shows, for example, range from programs with formats from the soap opera appeals of *Survivor* to the talent-based shows of *American Idol,* and dating or romance shows, such as *The Bachelor*. There are also celebrity versions of these competitive reality programs like *Celebrity Apprentice, Dancing with the Stars,* and *Celebrity Fit Club*.

The subgenre of crime-related reality programs includes shows that follow law enforcement officers (i.e. *COPS, Dog the Bounty Hunter, The Police Women of Broward County*), shows that focus on unsolved crimes (i.e. *America's Most Wanted*), and court

shows (i.e. *Judge Judy, The People's Court*). Crime or police-related reality television

shows have been popular since the 1980s with the premiere of *COPS* (Nabi, Stitt,

Halford, & Finnerty, 2006; Orbe, 2008). The appeal of these shows is their ability to

capture the raw emotions and theatrics of the accused (Lorenzo-Dus, 2008). According

to Lorenzo-Dus (2008), the entertainment value of most court shows is the fact that

"…the screen is frequently split into two equal size fragments during particularly hostile

exchanges, each showing the defendant's and the plaintiff's (non)verbal anger" (p. 88).

Documentary soap operas, also called reality-dramatic programming (Nabi et al.,

2006) or docusoaps, are shows that resemble real-life soap operas. In 1973, PBS aired a

12-hour documentary called *The American Family*. This show was the first time viewers

were able to watch the lives of ordinary people (Ebersole & Woods, 2007). *The American

Family* gained notoriety because "television viewers [got] a 'fly-on-the-wall' perspective

as [the family] engage in heated political debates at dinner tables, frequent neighborhood

dinner parties, struggle with internal and external conflicts, take vacations, work and

attend school" (Murray, 2009, p. 65).

The Real World allowed audiences to watch "real" people act out their daily lives

in front of the camera in ways never before on television. Expanding on the idea of *The

American Family*, MTV conceptualized the idea of putting eight strangers in a house

together and having their intimate lives at home and work filmed for several months.

Audiences became witness to all the drama, sex, and conflict of the cast members

(Ouellette & Murray, 2009). The voyeuristic appeal of reality television and the innate

curiosity of human nature have made these types of programs fill a gratifying need

fictional television could not (Nabi et al. 2006). The voyeuristic nature of reality

television can also satisfy guilty desires. Audiences get to see "real" people on reality-based television engage in naughty behavior designed to make us feel guilty about our enjoyment while watching (Ebersole & Woods, 2007).

Reality-based television programs also include many celebrity versions such as *The Osbournes, Run's House,* and *The Anna Nicole Show*. Ebersole and Woods (2007) suggest the diversity of the sub-genre allows reality television to satisfy a number of different needs. The creation of reality television forged a new form of voyeurism for audiences, allowing cameras to capture a behind-the-scenes look in the lives of celebrities. Nabi and colleagues (2003) observed that viewers enjoy reality television because it gives them an inside look into someone else's life. MTV's *The Osbournes* and *Cribs* provided audiences an opportunity to learn about the real person behind the celebrity (McCarthy, 2009). By Ozzy Osbourne allowing cameras to follow him and his family around during the course of their everyday lives, audiences were able to see there was more to him than just being known as the heavy metal prince of darkness.

Many reality-based television programs have become popular for features that span across different sub-genres. Audience members are able to actively engage while watching reality television because of its interactive features. Holmes (2004) found this format empowers the audience to have a participatory role on the reality show by voting by phone, Internet or text for its favorite contestant. The audience can directly affect the outcomes of competitive reality programs such as *American Idol* by calling in to vote. On VH1 dating shows such as the last season of *Flavor of Love* and *Megan Wants a Millionaire,* viewers were able to vote online for which contestants would make the first round of potential love interests for the celebrity.

Audience members can also interact with their favorite reality-based programs researching information about upcoming episodes and cast members on the Internet. These reality-based programs function as social interactions because audience members tend to discuss cast members and possible outcomes of the contestant with peers. Social involvement heightens the authenticity of a cast member. Hall (2009) found that audiences who view reality television spend a lot of time talking about cast members with friends. Audience members further engage in an active role with reality-based programs by opinions posted online and through blogs. The popularity of previously unknown Tiffany "New York" Pollard from viewers while on the first season of *Flavor of Love* resulted in the losing contestant getting her own VH1 dating show and two spin-off shows.

Some reality-based shows allow cast members to break the virtual fourth wall with viewers by speaking directly to the audience about their experiences in a confessional booth (Aslama & Pantti, 2006). The confessional format, which is internationally popular, originally gained notoriety on MTV's *The Real World*. Aslama and Pantti (2006) explained the confessional format tries to give the audience the illusion that the monologue is a first-person medium directed to the individual watching, not to the mass public. "The claim of extreme intimacy and authenticity seems to be a stake – the audience and the audience 'only' will get to know their raw emotions and naked feelings (p. 179). In confessional scenes, cast members are able to explain their actions on the show directly to viewers. According to Horton and Wohl (1956), "this simulacrum of conversational give and take may be called para-social interaction; …a seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and media persona" (p. 215).

Parasocial Relationships

Radio, television, and movies allow audiences to engage in face-to-face interactions with performers in the media. Horton and Wohl (1956) first conceptualized parasocial interactions as one-sided interactions in which members of the audience engage with media characters or personae (both fictional and non-fictional). When introduced to media personalities, audiences engage in parasocial interactions that can later turn into parasocial relationships (PSRs) (Perse & Rubin, 1998). Viewers respond in ways that they normally would, verbally and non-verbally, in social interactions. Parasocial interactions are restricted to the duration of the media exposure while PSRs continue beyond the initial interaction. Audience members create PSRs with celebrities or mediated personalities (Eyal & Fox, 2007) similar to those with friends in their own social circle.

Horton & Wohl (1956) argued parasocial relationships are non-dialectical and controlled by the media persona because the viewer has no opportunity to reciprocate in the discussion with the persona. Audience members, however, engage in a mutual give and take with personae. Parasocial interactions are phenomena that occur organically as viewers consume media, but in order for a full-fledged relationship to develop, viewers must be able to personally identify with a persona (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). The goal of an actor, regardless of whether the show is reality-based or fictional, is to effectively blur the lines of the formal performance of the show and the audience (Auter, 1992). This is especially the case when actors address the audience directly in a fashion that appears personal, intimate, and private, such as newscasters. Television personalities, especially on live programs, learn to adjust their tone, make self-disclosures (Schiappa,

Allen, & Gregg, 2007), and even engage in small talk in some instances (Park & Lennon, 2004).

Horton and Wohl (1956) also describe a parasocial relationship as interplay between what is real and what is fictional. The viewer entirely imagines his or her involvement (Alperstein, 1991; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rosengren, Windahl, Hakansson, & Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1976). "Thus, although people consciously know that PSRs are not real relationships, in many ways they feel psychologically real and meaningful" (Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, 2008, p. 262). The relationship is, however, only a framework filled in by the fantasies of the viewer.

Parasocial relationships facilitate an environment for individuals to engage in "quasi-friendships" (Cole & Leets, 1999, p. 496) with media personalities in a low-risk and high reward setting. Unlike in real-life friendships, in PSRs, viewers engage in friendships willingly and without obligation or effort. Television creates a barrier that allows the viewer to disengage from the relationship at any time and without consequences (Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009). PSRs also provide individuals with opportunities to meet needs that remain unfulfilled in their social lives, such as companionship (Auter, 1992; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). PSRs allow viewers to explore relationships they may be curious about but are hesitant to explore in real-life. According to Theran, Newberg, and Gleason (2010), "The lack of actual contact with a media figure means that parasocial interactions can offer positive social interactions with no risk of rejection and consequent feelings of unworthiness" (p. 271).

Horton and Wohl (1956) suggest the vividness of television as a medium lends itself to the formation of PSRs. Viewers are able to repeatedly interact with various personalities on TV. The close proximity to characters on television and frequency of contact with personae allow PSRs to develop. Since PSRs are nonreciprocal, if the interaction is unfulfilling, then the viewer's only option is to withdraw (Horton & Wohl, 1956). On the other hand, if the viewer's interaction is rewarding, the interactions will continue and build into a relationship with the media persona.

Audiences engage in PSRs with a variety of media personalities such as romance novel characters, (Burnett, 2000), world leaders (Horton & Wohl, 1956), soap opera characters (Cohen, 1999; Herzog, 1944; Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985), newscasters (Levy, 1979), sports figures (Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003), comedians (Auter, 1992; Turner, 1993) and other television personalities (Hoffner, 1996). Through interactions, viewers can explore relationships with various types of media personae and even fantasize about alternative life possibilities in a safe haven (Theran, Newberg, & Gleason, 2010) related to their aspirations for social processes and mobility (Annese, 2004; Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The creation of a PSR is dependent on both the characteristics of the media personality and the traits of the viewer. Rubin and McHugh (1987) suggest that simple exposure is insufficient for a viewer to learn enough information about a persona to evaluate them and develop a relationship. Continued association with media personae leads to an accumulation of history and knowledge that informs the present relationship (Alperstein, 1991; Haag, 1993; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Perse & R. Rubin, 1989). Therefore, PSRs develop over repeated interactions and repeated contact with the media

persona which "leads to the formation of a social relationship schema: People construct a mental representation of their relationships with the persona" (Klimmit, Hartmann & Schramm, 2006, p. 303). Viewers are prone to develop a perceived intimacy during parasocial interactions when audience members are physically and socially attracted to a persona (Hoffner, 1996; A. M. Rubin et al., 1985; Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

Viewers engage with personae in PSRs on one or more psychological levels, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). According to Schramm and Hartmann (2008), cognitively oriented parasocial responses are comprised of the viewer's evaluation of the persona's actions and the perceived similarities between the persona and oneself. Rubin et al. (1985) argued it is easier for people to create parasocial relationships with mediated personalities who exhibit realistic qualities, with which they can identify. Identification with a persona can create cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses by audience members.

Role-taking is an important component for individuals to identify with a persona and determine how authentic they believe a persona is on a reality show (Eyal & Fox, 2007). Hall (2009) found that when characters in a reality show appear authentic, viewers imagine themselves in the place of the cast member. Although viewers are aware that many of the scenarios on reality television are contrived, audiences are still able to engage with cast members and relate to their personal experiences. Furthermore, Hall (2009) finds that social and cognitive involvement are both strongly related to program enjoyment. If a cast member seems eccentric, Hall (2009) argues that people are still able to relate to them if their behavior seems candid and authentic. Even if viewer does not behave similarly to a persona, they knew someone else who does. As the audience gets to

know a persona, it creates a comfort level with that person similar to real-life friends (Hall, 2009). Self-disclosures, such as in confessional booths on reality-based television, deepens the perceived closeness and intimacy within a PSR. Beyond role taking, emotional responses (Eyal & Fox, 2007), attitudes and behavioral changes (Basil, 1996) are all elements for audience members' identification with personae.

Affectively oriented parasocial responses are comprised of the viewer's feeling toward the persona, both positive and negative. Just as with our friends in the real world, it takes direct observation and evaluations of gestures, tone, and behaviors to determine if we like or dislike a persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). "Soap characters frequently reminded viewers of people they knew, and viewers used characters' situations and behaviors as ways of understanding their own lives," according to Giles (2002, p. 280). In reality television, when cast members directly address viewers in seemingly private face-to-face interactions, it allows the audience to be empathetic toward them and more understanding toward their behavior (Eyal & Fox, 2007). Repeated PSIs help audience members determine how satisfying a PSR with a persona will be. According to Eyal and Fox (2007), identification is an affective process that allows audience members to adopt the perception of personae and live through their experiences vicariously. Within PSRs, intensely loyal viewers become "fans" or devotees of their favorite personae, regardless of whether the character is fictional or real. Fans believe they know and understand the persona in ways others do not and they believe they can anticipate what the persona will say and do next (Horton & Wohl, 1956), as if the persona were a close friend (Gudelunas, 2006).

Identification in PSRs further emphasizes the core values of a television program, which usually include pro-social behaviors (Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003; Papa, et al., 2000), such as friendship or affability (Turner, 1993). The media persona becomes a friend, counselor, or comforter whose actions are dependable and pleasing (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Theran et al. (2010) found that for adolescent girls, PSRs with television personae and celebrities were similar to pseudo-friends that aided in transition to adulthood and personal development. Audiences view their parasocial counterparts as "an idealized version of an everyday performance" from which to learn patterns of appropriate conduct (Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, 2008; Horton & Wohl, 1956). PSRs with media personalities provide models for interacting with, understanding, and coping with others (Haag 1993; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Additionally, the viewer can see the persona as an example of how to interact with members of the opposite sex (Brown & Basil, 1995; Obregón, 2005) and with people of varying social statuses (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Ebersole and Woods (2007) found viewers watched MTV's *Newlyweds* to see how other real couples interact. "In personal identification, viewers develop empathy, or emotional contagion, for characters they admire by putting themselves in the place of the characters and imagining how they would respond in similar scenarios" (Eberson & Woods, 2007, p. 33).

Lastly, the behaviorally oriented parasocial responses are comprised of the viewer's verbal, non-verbal, and paracommunication responses to the persona during interactions. Viewers can then become active participants in the media exposure by responding verbally and non-verbally to the persona (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Behavioral responses' assert Horton and Wohl (1956), comes "through direct observation

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and interpretation of his gestures and voice, his conversation and conduct in a variety of situations" (p. 215). When viewers are able to see and hear the cues that are usually present in face-to-face interaction, they respond to these nuances in ways that go beyond simple observation. This gives the impression that the persona is "responding to and sustaining the contributions of an invisible interlocutor" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 217). News anchors, for example, talk directly to the television when delivering their stories, which can create an environment with audience similar to a face-to-face interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin et al., 1985). The verbal and non-verbal give and take between individuals and personae create an intense loyalty in the PSR.

Behavioral responses have become increasingly active in the age of Internet and new media. Although the relationship is one-sided in that it is not a direct conversation (Horton & Wohl, 1956), audiences begin to feel invested in the relationship with the people on their favorite shows and begin to care about them and want to know what happens next. The Internet assists with the fascination of television shows because viewers can go on blogs or websites to find out more about cast members even before the next episode premieres. Eyal and Fox (2007) found that for viewers, "…information-seeking-show-related behaviors [are] positively associated with show environment" (p. 17). Further, new technology allows audiences to consume media in new ways. Audiences now have control over when and how many times they watch their favorite shows. People can TiVo or DVR shows, download episodes to watch online, and buy the DVD of the season of their favorite shows (Eyal & Fox, 2007).

Although most viewers will never meet the media figures or celebrities with whom they have PSRs, curiosity about these individuals' personal lives extends past what

people see on television or in the movies. Blogs and social networking sites are forums through which people can discuss their positive or negative feelings toward different celebrities with other fans (also their fictional characters). De Backer and colleagues (2007) observed as a fan's PSR with a celebrity strengthens, the devotee begins to think about and process information about celebrities as he or she does with friends in real life. De Backer and colleagues (2007) suggest, "If this happens regularly, as is the case with celebrities who are always in the news, our brain starts accumulating these encounters and makes us falsely believe that these people are part of our social networks" (p. 340). The PSR, although still one-sided, is no longer a passive interaction, but one that is active on the part of the viewer (Cohen, 2004). People's attractions to celebrities (Brown et al., 2003) serve as motivation for engaging in parasocial interactions with famous people. People who value status and fantasize about becoming a celebrity also watch and enjoy more reality-based programming (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004).

Since celebrities live their lives in the spotlight they are subject to criticism. Tyler and Bennett (2010) found that not all PSRs with celebrities are positive. Abhorrence, instead of admiration for a celebrity, drives some fanatics. Cohen (2009) discovered that when media figures or celebrities' actions morally or socially offend a loyal fan, their PSR will weaken or break with the star at a quicker rate then they would an actual friend. This parasocial break-up is similar to ones viewers experience when their favorite television show is cancelled (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). The public often perceives media personalities negatively and undeserving of their celebrity status when they became famous for actions that are morally bankrupt. "Hatred can be a community-forming attachment to a 'bad object'; however, it is not the mode of identification we normally

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associate with fandom, but rather a perverse (if equally fanatical) 'anti-fandom'" (Tyler & Bennett, 2010, p. 377). Thus, as easily as a positive PSR can ensue, a viewer can develop an equally charged distaste for a celebrity.

Moral Disengagement

The process of socialization teaches people what behaviors are morally acceptable within a culture. Moral development teaches standards for what actions are right and wrong. According to Ashkar and Kenny (2007), people form their moral standards through social experiences. "Social interaction with parents, family, and peers play an important role" (p. 108). The socialization process continues through direct tuition, in educational institutions, for example (Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C., 1996). Media consumption further contributes to social learning because adolescents often choose media figures as their heroes and role models (Giles, 2002). Once a person has internalized the moral codes of society, they self-sanction their behavior based on those standards. In society, people try to act in ways that will give them satisfaction and self-worth and avoid behavior that will result in self-censure (Bandura, 1990; Bandura et al., 1996).

Bandura (1990) found, in general, people do not engage in deviant behaviors that are unjustifiable because it is not socially acceptable. "Civilized conduct requires, in addition to humane personal codes, social systems that uphold compassionate behavior and renounce cruelty" (Bandura, 1990, p. 43). People often experience personal conflict or stress when confronted with conduct that goes against their moral standards. Moral disengagement explains ways in which people are able to behave immorally without experiencing personal stress. The activation of an individual's pre-existing moral

standards, however, is essential for the self-regulation process to begin. "Selective activation or disengagement of self-reactive control permits different types of conduct, given the same moral standards" (Bandura, 1990, p. 28). According to Bandura, Caprara, and Zsolnal (2000), the usage of moral justifications, euphemistic language, advantageous comparisons, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregarding or distorting the consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame are psychological devices that make moral disengagement possible. Society is full of examples of moral disengagement from war times to business practices and through the mass media. In moral disengagement, people disengage not from the relationship, but it is a disengagement from the individual's moral monitoring processing.

Moral justification is an important component for an individual to morally disengage. People need to be able to justify their morally reprehensible conduct. According to Bandura (1990), "In this process, detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as in the service of moral purposes" (p. 29). After cognitive restructuring, an individual can then proceed to perform reprehensible acts without stress. The mass media are essential tools for elites to reach the masses and provide justifications for controversial issues, such as war (Bandura, 1990). Television in particular is the most effective vehicle to mobilize justification for a cause. As reality television is increasingly popular, people are able to justify the morality of the programs they consume because it has becomes part of cult culture. The pervasiveness of reality television makes all of the morally reprehensible actions on reality television commonplace and naturally occurring.

Another tool of moral disengagement is euphemistic labeling. People respond differently to the same idea or action depending on the language used to describe key terms. According to Bandura (1990), "Through convoluted verbiage, destructive conduct is made benign and those who engage in it are relieved of a sense of personal agency" (p. 31). News coverage of war frequently uses palliative expressions. For example, what one country calls a "terrorist," another calls a "freedom fighter" (p. 32). Sanitizing labels, specialized jargon and colorful metaphors are linguistic devices used to change the nature of actions. Illegitimate actions end up sounding respectable. Reprehensible behavior becomes blameless, when for instance, the "conspirator" transforms into the "team player" (p. 32). On VH1's *I Love Money*, former reality cast members compete against one another for a grand prize of $250,000. Contestants on *I Love Money* engage in numerous tactics to stay in the game until the end including, forming secret alliances, cheating, lying, and throwing competitions.

An advantageous comparison in moral disengagement references a reprehensible action by another party to provide legitimization to their argument. "Social comparison is similarly used to show that the social labeling of acts may depend more on the ideological allegiances of the labelers than on the acts themselves" (Bandura, 1990, p. 33). Cast members on the reality show *Bad Girls Club* frequently engage in advantageous comparisons to justify their behavior on the show. The premise of the show is to have a house full of girls who are self-proclaimed "bad girls" with morally reprehensible reputations. On the show, however, the women weekly defend their own behavior after drunken nights at the club by reminding the audience for example they

might have gotten into a fight, but at least they did not take a random guy home and sleep with him.

Moral justification and palliative labeling are the most effective devices of cognitively restructuring behaviors. When an individual believes their injurious conduct has a high social or moral purpose, they are able to justify and feel positively about their behavior (Bandura et al., 1996). The *Real Housewives of New Jersey* gained notoriety for having cast members who were related to each other. Caroline, the family matriarch is widely quoted for saying during season one, "if you with my family, you're messing with me," and fought anyone including cast member Danielle, who threatened to go against her sister Dina on the show.

The next set of moral disengagement tactics is the displacement and diffusion of responsibility. Bandura et al. (1996) posit that when people can displace responsibility of their reprehensible behavior on social pressures or the circumstances that dictates the situation. After a season of a reality-based television program, cast members frequently claim that they were unfairly portrayed on the show and were the victim of poor editing by producers. Diffusion of responsibility occurs when actions are the product of collective thought and group decision-making. In that way, no single person feels responsible for inhumane behavior, policies or actions. As previously mentioned, on the reality show *I Love Money* and other programs, such as *Survivor* and MTV's *The Challenge,* cast members form secret alliances and throw mission to strategically get the strongest competitors eliminated from show.

Dehumanization and the blaming of victims allows people to personally commit some of the most reprehensible actions that deviate from their moral standards. "Once

dehumanized, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns, but as subhuman objects" (Bandura, 1990, p. 38). When groups of people become sub-human as in terms of slavery or in Nazi Germany, it is easier to rationalize the brutalization of these victims. Dehumanization brings the worst out in people and allows them to do cruel and inhumane actions. Attribution of blame holds the victims responsible for a morally reprehensible act committed on them. Some rapists claim their victims deserved it, and in some cases even secretly liked the physically abusive transgression (Bandura, 1990). On the reality show *Jersey Shore*, the male cast members go out nightly and reduce women in bars to "tits" and "ass" in their hopes of finding hot promiscuous women to take home later that evening. The women in the bar that do not physically meet the standards of the *Jersey Shore* men are publically humiliated by being labeled as a "grenades" that deserve to be mocked and dehumanized and in perpetuation of their mission to have a "grenade free America."

Disregard or distortion of consequences in moral disengagement allows people to engage in injurious actions by minimizing the harm of their actions. Personal gains or social inducements motivate individuals to morally disengage from their detrimental behavior by distorting or ignoring the consequences to avoid self-censure. "In addition to selective inattention and cognitive distortion of effects, the misrepresentation may involve active efforts to discredit evidence of the harm they cause" (Bandura, 1990, p. 37). Disregard of consequences is increasingly easier to achieve when people do not have to visibly see the effects of their actions or faces of their victims (Bandura, 1990). In many Internet crimes, for instance, many offenders are able to swindle unsuspecting victims who remain faceless to them. The show *Jersey Shore* is flooded with examples of

both disregard and distortion of consequences. Last season, for instance, when Snooki got drunk in the middle of the day on the beach or when Ronnie got into a bar fight, both were arrested by Seaside Heights Police. The *Jersey Shore* cast members knew they were being filmed and bringing additional attention to themselves with the camera crews following them around and had no regard for the consequences of their actions, which ended up with charges on their criminal record. Additionally, every week Ronnie and Samantha fight verbally, physically, and damage each other's property inside their beach apartment. They have no regard for the consequences of being in an abusive relationship because they kiss and make-up at the end of the episode.

The psychological process of moral disengagement can transpire using one or more of the various tools outlined by Bandura (1990). "For example, institutionalized racial and sexual discrimination practices that take a heavy toll on their victims, require social justification, attributions of blame, dehumanization, impersonalized agencies to carry them out, and inattention to the injurious effects they cause" (Bandura, 1990, p. 43). Becoming morally disengaged in many cases is a gradual process, "during which people may not fully recognize the changes they are undergoing" (Bandura, Caprara and Zsolnal, 2000, p. 42). Cognitive reprogramming is a complex process that requires one to deviate from pre-existing moral standards. On the other hand, when individuals consume media, the process of moral disengagement tends to be more simplistic because people are able to enjoy television shows without necessarily self-censuring their media habits.

The examination of individuals' ability to morally disengage while consuming media is still in its infancy. Uses and gratification theory states that individuals are aware of their needs, evaluate various channels and content, assess functional alternatives, and

select the media or interpersonal channel that they believe will provide the gratifications they seek" (Nabi, et al., 2003, p. 312). Various media are associated with accommodating different needs through the uses and gratification perspective. Audiences choose a particular medium because of their expected gratification from the source (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Television as a medium is generally associated with satisfying self-filling and self-gratifying needs (Katz et al. 1974). Aside from companionship (Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), the main goal of watching television is enjoyment, which means the viewer receives pleasure from consuming that medium (Raney, 2004). Pleasure and enjoyment directly connects to the audience member's positive feelings toward the characters in a show. If enjoyment is the expected gratification, it is also a motivation for viewers to morally disengage while watching their favorite television programs (Raney, 2004).

Disposition theory explains that people morally monitor the characters they watch on television in the same way they do themselves. According to this theory, "we come to like characters whose actions and motivations we judge as proper or morally correct while we dislike characters whose actions and motivations we judge as improper or morally incorrect" (Raney, 2004, p. 351). Enjoyment increases when liked characters have positive outcomes and disliked have negative. In disposition theory of drama, audiences that enjoy crime-dramas get satisfaction from watching morally bankrupt criminals punished (Raney & Bryant, 2002). Disposition theory of humor and mirth is not as straightforward. For example, people laugh at comedians' jokes that ridicule particular persons or groups for the sake of enjoyment (Raney, 2004). Despite the theory's claim

that people morally monitor television characters, people are still able to disengage and "defend those strong feelings for the sake of enjoyment" (Raney, 2004, p. 349).

Moral disengagement and selective activation allows for enjoyment while watching favorite or liked characters on television. If people are able to identify with a persona and make emotional connections, they are able to initially like television characters without much thought. Most people initially evaluate television characters based on their ability to identify with characters that share certain salient characteristics (Giles, 2002). When enjoyment is the goal of watching television, people minimize their mental processing and energy to understand show narratives. According to schema theory, people use mental shortcuts from pre-existing stereotypes or learned scripts to use the least amount of cognitive energy or resources when deciding if they like or dislike characters once the characters are introduced into the narrative (Raney, 2004). Morally judging every action of a liked character is a systematic process that takes away from enjoyment while watching television. Raney (2004) argues, "In some cases, moral judgment may indeed precede affect, as the theory in its current form contends" (p. 356). Therefore, people can decide if they like or dislike a television character without morally monitoring their actions beforehand. That is not to say that if a liked television character behaves in a manner a viewer morally opposes, that viewer will no longer be able to disengage or lose enjoyment from the program. Similarly to people's ability to end a PSR when a celebrity acts morally reprehensible, viewers can also begin to dislike characters they previously liked.

People prefer to avoid cognitive dissonance; therefore, viewers spend more time defending the actions of favorite television characters than morally evaluating their every

action on the show. When audiences like characters, they morally justify the motives or blame someone else for morally inappropriate behavior of their favorite personae (Raney, 2004). Television also allows audiences to suspend belief for the sake of enjoyment. Raney and colleagues (2009) observed the ironies of successful Hollywood movies that feature an anti-hero as the protagonist. The anti-hero violates numerous moral standards that lack any justifications but people still find the films enjoyable. "Further, in most anti-hero movies the protagonists are not punished in a way that their behaviors would typically deserve" (p. 7). In their study, the researchers found that although people did not morally justify the anti-hero's immoral behavior, audiences were able to suspend judgment because of their ability to identify with the anti-hero and enjoy the film. Raney and colleagues (2009) pointed out, just because people enjoy these films does not mean they will engage in deviant behavior themselves. As in other parasocial interactions, movies provide a safe haven for audiences to live vicariously through the adventures of their favorite villain.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to explore two types of reality stars: those who had fame before being on reality television and those who have fame because of the show. Using the PSI-Processing Scale, I compared levels of parasocial interactions for each one to the other, as well how moral disengagement might play a role for each type of reality star. I also explored whether these parasocial relationships are influenced by the frequency with which respondents watch various types of sub-genres of reality-based programs (i.e. game docs, dating shows, documentary soap operas).

Reality television is an attractive medium to foster parasocial relationships. Past research has shown that spectators are more likely to form parasocial relationships with media figures than with fictional soap opera actors (Giles, 2002). Through reality television consumption, audience members are able to create parasocial relationships with media personae in "real-life" soap operas. Since audience members seek parasocial relationships with people they can identify with, it is more likely spectators will be able to relate to non-celebrities at a higher degree than with celebrities because they see non-celebrities more like themselves.

People follow the lives of celebrities from gossip, tabloid magazines, online websites, social media, and on reality television. Even if just as a surveillance tool, some people watch reality television shows with celebrities to know what is going on in their lives, even if they find the material morally offensive. Audiences that watch reality television programs have come to expect conflict, sexual adventure, and the pleasure of voyeurism when they consume these programs (Turner, 2005).

The researcher will attempt to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: Do audiences create stronger parasocial relationships with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?

RQ 2: Does liking the various reality show genres predict the strength of parasocial relationships?

RQ 3: Do audiences morally disengage at a higher rate with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?

RQ 4: Does liking various genres of reality-based television programs predict moral disengagement?

METHOD

I conducted this study to investigate how the strength of viewer parasocial relationships with reality television stars are affected if the person achieved celebrity status before being on a reality show. Further, I addressed the question of whether the type of reality show impacts moral disengagement levels. To measure levels of parasocial relationships, moral disengagement, media consumption, and reality television viewing habits, I administered an online survey to 244 students at a large major university. The following section details the method employed to collect data necessary for analysis, including the sampling method, the construction of the research instrument, and the delivery of the instrument. Survey questions from the study are located in the appendix.

Participants for Study

This study attempted to explore the perceptions of reality television viewers. Participants were required to have enough familiarity with reality shows on either network or cable channels to have a favorite celebrity and non-celebrity on a reality-based television programs to adequately complete this survey. Six participants were unable to fulfill this requirement and complete the survey, and thus were excluded from the analysis. According to Ebersole and Wood (2007), the target audience for reality television viewing is within the ages of 18 to 24. To attract an appropriate age range of participants, a survey was administered to 244 respondents who attend a large southern university. Respondents consisted of 191 females (78.3%) and 50 males (20.5%). Of the sample, 204 identified themselves as White (83.6%), 30 Black (12.3%), 13 Hispanic (5.3%), 7 Native American (2.9%), 5 Asian (2%), and 1 Middle Eastern (0.4%). Of the

participants, 36 identified themselves as freshman (34.8%), 66 sophomores (27%), 85

juniors (34.8%), 54 seniors (22.1%), and 2 were graduate students (0.8%). In this study,

108 participants identified themselves as Republican (44.3%), 51 independent (20%), and

44 were Democrats (18%). The average age of the respondents in this study was 20

(SD=1.96).

In this study, participants watched more reality television on cable than on

network television. Of the participants, 17 (6.9%) said they never watch reality-based

programs on cable television (ie. TBS, VH1, BRAVO, etc.), 16 (6.5%) less than once a

month, 13 (5.3%) once a month, 28 (11.4%) 2-3 times a month, 48 (19.6%) once a week,

73 (29.9%) 2-3 times a week, and 49 (20%) responded daily. Of the participants, 29

(11.8%) also said they never watch reality-based programs on network television (ie.

FOX, ABC, CBS, NBC), 32 (13.1%) less than once a month, 18 (7.3%) once a month, 28

(11.4%) 2-3 times a month, 54 (22.1%) once a week, 56 (22.9%) 2-3 times a week, and

26 (10.6%) responded daily. In this study, participants watched reality-based

documentary soap operas more than dating or game shows. Of the participants, 48

(19.6%) said they never watch reality-based documentary soap operas (e.g *Jersey Shore,*

The Real Housewives of Orange County), 17 (6.9%) less than once a month, 17 (6.9%)

once a month, 27 (11%) 2-3 times a month, 49 (20%) once a week, 53 (21.7%) 2-3 times

a week, and 31 (12.7%) responded daily. Of the participants, 93 (38.1%) also said never

watch reality-based dating shows (e.g *The Bachelor, Flavor of Love*), 47 (19.2%) less

than once a month, 23 (9.4%) once a month, 22 (9%) 2-3 times a month, 37 (15.1%) once

a week, 19 (7.7%) 2-3 times a week, and 3 (1.2%) responded daily. Moreover, 93

(38.1%) of the participants said they never watch reality-based game shows (e.g *Survivor,*

The Biggest Loser), 44 (18%) less than once a month, 22 (9%) once a month, 27 (11%) 2-3 times a month, 36 (14.7%) once a week, 22 (9%) 2-3 times a week, and 0 (0%) responded daily. In this study, participants read about celebrities in gossip magazines and on gossip websites. Of the participants, 65 (26.6%) said they never read gossip magazines about celebrities, 34 (13.9%) less than once a month, 42 (17.2%) once a month, 28 (11.4%) 2-3 times a month, 41 (16.8%) once a week, 25 (10.2%) 2-3 times a week, and 11 (4.5%) responded daily. Of the participants, 103 (42.2%) also said they never read go onto gossip websites about celebrities, 32 (13.1%) less than once a month, 18 (7.3%) once a month, 28 (11.4%) 2-3 times a month, 21 (8.6%) once a week, 18 (7.3%) 2-3 times a week, and 24 (9.8%) responded daily.

Participants for this survey remained anonymous; names were not recorded. Participation was strictly voluntary, and participants were informed of the exact purpose of the study. This information was included at the beginning of the survey. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique employed by Louisiana State University's Media Effects Laboratory (MEL). The MEL generated a subject pool from an online database comprised of LSU students registered in mass communications classes. These students were notified about the survey by email and given the incentive to earn .5 extra credit points in their mass communications course for completing the survey.

Survey Instrument and Procedures

The survey for this study included ten question blocks. A 7-point Likert-type scale was used for all measures throughout the survey. Two open-ended questions on the survey asked respondents to name their "favorite celebrity" and "favorite non-celebrity"

on a reality-based television program. Transitional and information pages were included in the survey. Before taking the survey, to insure no harm, respondents were required to agree to the implied informed consent form for mass communication research.

The survey itself began with questions about respondents' media consumption. The first question block of the Qualtrics survey asked participants to please indicate how frequently they use the internet, watch television, listen to the radio, and read newspapers and magazines. The second block asked participants how frequently they watched reality-based game shows, dating shows, documentary soap operas, and other questions regarding their reality television consumption. The next portion of the survey was on parasocial relationships and moral disengagement. This section begins with an instructional page that explained: For the next portions of the survey, a *celebrity* refers to someone who was famous before being on a reality-based TV program (e.g. Ozzy Osbourne, Anna Nicole Smith, Flavor Flav, Chad Ochocinco). The instructional page was bolded, in 14-point font, and with the word "celebrity" in red for emphasis. Respondents were then asked to fill in the name of their favorite *"Non-celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program. The following two blocks asked respondents to think about their favorite non-celebrity on a reality-based television program when answering the 14-item parasocial and 12-item moral disengagement questions. Respondents were then asked to fill in the name of their favorite *"Celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program. The following two blocks asked respondents to then think about their favorite celebrity on a reality-based television program when answering the 14-item parasocial and 12-item moral disengagement questions. The last

portion of the survey was on demographics. Respondents were asked to disclose their race, age, gender, education level, and family income.

Once the survey was created, the questions along with a brief description of my study were submitted to the Institutional Review Board for approval. Two weeks later, my study was approved and given IRB number E5373 with an expiration date of February 27, 2014. I then created the questionnaire using *Qualtrics*, an online survey-building software. Next, I submitted the survey to the university's Media Effects Lab. Faculty and graduate students must provide IRB approval, a description of the study, and a copy of their instrument to satisfy the requirements for access to the MEL subject pool. After the study was approved, I was able to upload the survey from Qualtrics. MEL sends out weekly emails to students to notify them about the new studies that are available to the subject pool. The survey was available to students from September 13, 2011, to September 21, 2011. SPSS was used to analyze the data.

Measurements

Media Consumption. The survey began by measuring respondent levels of media consumption. Respondents were asked how frequently they use the Internet, watch television, listen to the radio, and read newspapers and magazines using a 7-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Daily). Next, I asked respondents to rate their reality television consumption and viewing habits using the same scale. Specifically, the respondents were asked how frequently they watched various types of sub-genres of reality-based programs (i.e. game docs, dating shows, documentary soap operas). For the purpose of this study, reality-based programs excluded re-enactment programs, local and national news programs, video-clip programs, and talk shows.

Participants were then given the definition of "celebrity" to insure that they clearly distinguished between a celebrity and a non-celebrity. For this study, they were told the word "celebrity" refers to someone who was famous before being on a reality-based TV program. Ozzy Osbourne, Anna Nicole Smith, Flavor Flav, and Chad Ochocinco were listed as examples of celebrities. The survey required respondents to fill in the names of their favorite celebrity and non-celebrity on a reality-based television program to complete the remainder of the survey. In the following sections, respondents were instructed to answer identical parasocial and moral disengagement questions for both their "favorite celebrity" and "favorite non-celebrity" on a reality-based television program.

Parasocial Relationships. Respondents' levels of parasocial relationships with their favorite celebrity and non-celebrity on a reality-based TV program were obtained using Schramm and Hartmann's (2008) universal tool for PSR-Processing. Schramm and Hartmann's (2008) PSR-Processing Scale is a 12-item measure that includes six questions for the cognitive, five for the affective, and two for the behavioral dimensions of parasocial relationships.

The PSR-Processing Scales measured the intensity of the parasocial relationship using a 7-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Two questions were added to inquire whether respondents searched for information about their favorite celebrity/non-celebrity through online websites, in magazines, and if they follow these stars on Twitter. Reliability of the 14-item questions on non-celebrity was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .86$). Reliability of the 14-item questions on celebrity was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .89$).

Moral Disengagement. Respondents' ability to morally disengage from their favored personae was assessed using a modified version of the 32-item questionnaire developed by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (1996). Items containing the terms "children" or "kids" were changed to "favorite celebrity" and "favorite non-celebrity" to make the questionnaire relevant for survey participants. Some items, however, particularly those referring to test taking, homework, and classroom behavior could not be altered without changing the essence of the original statement. Twenty items that were not applicable to celebrities and non-celebrities on reality shows were eliminated. The 12-item measure includes four questions for moral justification and displacement of responsibility, two questions for attribution of blame, and one question for dehumanization and euphemistic language. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Reliability of the 12-item questions on non-celebrity was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha= .90$). Reliability of the 12-item questions on celebrity was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha= . 92$).

Demographics. Sample demographics of the respondents were asked in the final section of the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to disclose their race, age, gender, education level, and family income.

Results from this study vary with existing research on parasocial relationships and moral disengagement. Interesting findings involve the impact the genre of the reality-based television program had on the respondent's strength of parasocial relationship and degree of moral disengagement with their favorite celebrity and non-celebrity reality star.

Table 1.

Provides a Full Listing of the Stars Respondents Identified

Non-Celebrity	Frequency	Celebrity	Frequency
Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi	41	Kim Kardashian	49
Kim Kardashian	17	Khole Kardashian	13
Pauly D (Jersey Shore)	16	Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi	12
J-Wow (Jersey Shore	9	Chad Ochocinco	8
Lauren Conrad	8	Pauly D (Jersey Shore)	7
Khloe Kardashian	8	Jessica Simpson	7
Kyle Richardson	6	Flavor Flav	7
Bethenny Frankel	5	Lauren Conrad	5
Rachel Zoe	5	Heidi Klum	5
Teresa Guidice	4	Donald Trump	5
Vinnie (Jersey Shore)	4	Terrell Owens	5
Gibbs	3	Bethenny Frankel	4
Kourtney Kardashian	3	Ice-T	4
Terrell Owens	3	Paris Hilton	3
Evelyn Lozada	3	Hulk Hogan	3
Chad Ochocinco	3	Gene Simmons	3
Tyra Banks	2	Mike "Situation" (Jersey Shore)	3
Ronnie (Jersey Shore)	2	Tyra Banks	3
Anna Nicole Smith	2	Ali Fedotowsky (Bachelor)	3
Hoopz (Flavor of Love)	2	Rozonda Thomas (Chilli)	2
Chris Daughtry	2	Kendra Wilkinson	2
Rob Dyrdek	2	Sarah Palin	2
Anderson Cooper	2	Jennifer Lopez	2
Jeff Lewis	2	Rachel Zoe	2
Boston Bob (Survivor)	2	Bret Michaels	2
Mike "Situation"	2	Ozzy Osbourne	2
Melanie Moore	2	Kathy Griffin	2
Lisa Vanderpump	2	Lala Vasquez	2
Wes	2	Ashton Kutcher	2
Caroline Manzo	1	Sarah Ferguson	2
Ozzy Osbourne	1	Gary Busey	2

Jon Gosselin	1	American Pickers	2
Scott Disck	1	Dr. Drew	1
Chef Duff	1	Guliana DePandi	1
Gretchen Rossi	1	Taylor Armstrong	1
Brad Womack	1	Kyle Richardson	1
Ty Pennington	1	J-Wow (Jersey Shore)	1
Kristen Cavalari	1	Nicole Richie	1
Marci (Teen Mom)	1	Dr. Will Kirby	1
Kenny (MTV Challenge)	1	Trent Dilfer	1
Jillian Michaels	1	Rex Ryan	1
Dunbar	1	Devin Grissom	1
Gretchen Rossi	1	Tamara Barney	1
Tamara Barney	1	Denise Richardson	1
Amy Juergens	1	Sharon Osbourne	1
Carrie Underwood	1	Jeff Conway	1
Shaq	1	Holly Madison	1
Rick Harrison	1	Jake Pavelka (Bachelor)	1
Rachael (Big Brother)	1	Richard Hatch	1
Dog the Bounty Hunter	1	Lamar Odom	1
Paris Hilton	1	Chef Ramsey	1
Chelsea Handler	1	Chelsea Handler	1
Renee Graziano	1	Paul Watson	1
Paul Walton	1	Teresa Guidice	1
Kurt Cobain	1	Rob Dyrdek	1
Duncan Penn	1	Charlie Sheen	1
Caitlyn (Teen Moms)	1	Florence Henderson	1
Sammi (Jersey Shore)	1	Reverend Run	1
Tami Roman	1	Metta World Peace	1
Randy (Yes to Dress)	1	Whale Wars People	1
Abby Lee (Dance Moms)	1	Barry (Storage Wars)	1
Damian Whitewood	1	Jimmy Fallon	1
Bear Grills	1	Kourtney Kardashian	1
Patti (Million Matchmaker)	1	Guy Fieri	1
Vicki Gunvalson	1	Adrienne Maloff	1
Mario Lopez	1	Camille Grammer	1
Jeff Probst	1	Jacqueline Laurita	1
Jessica Simpson	1	Bear Grills	1
Wynonna Judd	1	Jillian Michaels	1
Adrienne Maloof	1		
Kate Gosselin	1		
Heidi Klum	1		
Sophia Bush	1		
Emily Maynard	1		
Yigit Pura	1		
Shaunie O'Neal	1		
Jim Halpert	1		

RQ 1: Do audiences create stronger parasocial relationships with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?

To examine RQ1, I ran a paired sample t-test on the 14-item non-celebrity and celebrity PSR-Processing Scales. According to the results, there was no statistically significant difference between PSRs with celebrities (M=3.46, SD=1.20) and non-celebrities (M=3.44, SD=1.08), t (243)= -.44, p>.05.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics of Non-Celebrity and Celebrity Parasocial Relationships

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Celebrity	3.44	1.08
Celebrity	3.46	1.20

n=244
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

RQ 2: Does liking the various reality show genres predict the strength of parasocial relationships?

To answer this research question for non-celebrities, the data were analyzed by running a multiple linear regression model. I used the non-celebrity PSR-Processing scale for the dependent variable and reality game shows, dating shows, and documentary soap operas as the three independent variables for the multiple regression model. The R-squared value for the model is .12 and the adjusted R-squared value for the parasocial non-celebrity scale is .11. The constant for this regression equation was 16.44. This is the y-intercept of the equation. While viewing game shows was not a significant predictor of PSRs for non-celebrities (T = 0.32, β = 0.00, p>0.98) (M= 2.71, SD=1.79), dating shows

(T = 2.93, β = 0.25, p <0.00) (M= 2.79, SD = 1.83) and documentary soap operas were

significant predictors of PSRs for non-celebrities (T = 2.390, β = 0.162, p<0.02)

(M=4.18, SD=2.11).

Table 3.

Results of Non-Celebrity Parasocial Relationships and Independent Variables of Genres of Reality Shows

Variable	B	T
Games Shows	0.00	0.03
Dating Shows	0.25	2.93***
Documentary Soap Operas	0.16	2.39**

n=244
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

To answer this research question for celebrities, the data were analyzed by

running a multiple linear regression model. I used the celebrity PSR-Processing scale for

the dependent variable and reality game shows, dating shows, and documentary soap

operas as the three independent variables for the multiple regression model. The R-

squared value for the model is .12 and the adjusted R-squared value for the parasocial

celebrity scale is .11. The constant for this regression equation was 14.35. This is the y-

intercept of the equation. While viewing game shows was not a significant predictor of

PSRs for celebrities (t = .30, β = .02, p>0.76) (M=2.73, SD=1.79), dating shows (t = 2.58,

β = 0.22, p<0.01) (M=2.79, SD=1.83) and documentary soap operas were significant

predictors of PSRs for celebrities (t = 2.529, β = 0.172, p<0.01) (M=4.18, SD=2.108).

Table 4.

Results of Celebrity Parasocial Relationships and Independent Variables of Genres of Reality Shows

Variable	B	T
Game Shows	0.02	0.30
Dating Shows	0.22	2.58***
Documentary Soap Opera	0.17	2.53***

n=244
R2=0.120
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

RQ 3: Do audiences morally disengage at a higher rate with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?

To examine RQ 3, I ran a paired sample t-test on the 12-item non-celebrity and celebrity Moral Disengagement Scales. According to the results, there was a statistically significant difference between moral disengagement with celebrities (M=2.63, SD=1.18) and non-celebrities (M=2.87, SD=1.13), T (243)= 5.03, p<.00.

Table 5.

Descriptive Statistics of Non-Celebrity and Celebrity Moral Disengagement

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Celebrity	2.87	1.13
Celebrity	2.63	1.18

n=244
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

Next, the moral disengagement scale was broken into five categories for both celebrity and non-celebrity. Moral justification questions consisted of 4 items with

Chronbach's alpha of (α = 0.76) for non-celebrities and (α = 0.84) for celebrities. Then I

ran a paired sample t-test on the 4-item celebrity and non-celebrity moral justification

questions. According to the results, there was a statistically significant difference

between moral justification with celebrities (*M*= 2.98, SD=1.47) and non-celebrities

(*M*=3.28, SD=1.30), *t* (243)= 4.95, p<.00.

Table 6.

Descriptive Statistics of Non-Celebrity and Celebrity Moral Justification

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Celebrity	3.28	1.13
Celebrity	2.98	1.47

n=244
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

Moral displacement questions consisted of 4 items with Cronbach's alpha of (α =

.82) for non-celebrities and (α = 0.863) for celebrities. Then I ran a paired sample t-test

on the 4-item celebrity and non-celebrity moral justification questions. According to the

results, there was a statistically significant difference between moral displacement with

celebrities (*M*=2.43, SD=1.24) and non-celebrities (*M*= 2.66, SD = 1.244), *t* (243)= 3.86,

p<.00.

Table 7.

Descriptive Statistics of Non-Celebrity and Celebrity Moral Displacement

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Celebrity	2.66	1.24
Celebrity	2.43	1.24

n=244
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

Attribution of blame questions consisted of 2 items with Chronbach's alpha of (α = .82) for non-celebrities and (α = .86) for celebrities. Then I ran a paired sample t-test on the 4-item celebrity and non-celebrity attribution of blame questions. According to the results, there was a statistically significant difference between moral attribution with celebrities (M=2.44, SD=1.42) and non-celebrities (M=2.68, SD=1.43), $T(243) = 3.26$, p<.01).

Table 8.

Descriptive Statistics of Non-Celebrity and Celebrity Attribution of Blame

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Celebrity	2.68	1.43
Celebrity	2.44	1.42

n=244
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

RQ 4: Does liking various genres of reality-based television program predict moral disengagement?

To answer this research question for non-celebrities, the data were analyzed by running a multiple linear regression model. I used the non-celebrity moral disengagement scale for the dependent variable and viewing of reality game shows, dating shows, and documentary soap operas as the three independent variables for the multiple regression model. The R-squared value for the model is 0.064 and the adjusted R-squared value for the non-celebrity moral disengagement scale is 0.053. The constant for this regression equation was 13.368. This is the y-intercept of the equation. While viewing game shows was a significant predictor of moral disengagement for non-celebrities ($t = 1.96$, $\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) ($M=2.73$, $SD=1.79$), dating shows ($t = 1.31$, $\beta = 0.11$, $p > 0.19$) ($M=2.79$, $SD=1.83$) and documentary soap operas were not significant predictors of moral disengagement for non-celebrities ($t = 3.33$, $\beta = 0.02$, $p > 0.740$) ($M= 4.18$, $SD=2.11$).

Table 9.

Results of Non-Celebrity Moral Disengagement and Independent Variables of Genres of Reality Shows

Variable	B	T
Game Shows	.16	1.96**
Dating Shows	.12	1.32
Documentary Soap Operas	.02	3.33

n=244
R2=0.06
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

To answer this research question for celebrities, the data were analyzed by running a multiple linear regression model. I used the celebrity moral disengagement

scale for the dependent variable and reality game shows, dating shows, and documentary

soap operas as the three independent variables for the multiple regression model. The R-

squared value for the model is .03 and the adjusted R-squared value for the celebrity

moral disengagement scale is .02. The constant for this regression equation was 13.20.

This is the y-intercept of the equation. While viewing game shows was a significant

predictor of moral disengagement for celebrities ($t = 1.68$, $\beta = .14$, $p<.09$) (M=2.73,

SD=1.79), dating shows ($t = .88$, $\beta = .08$, $p>0.38$) (M=2.79, SD=1.83) and documentary

soap operas were significant predictors of moral disengagement for celebrities ($t = -1.13$,

$\beta = -0.09$, $p >0.19$) (M=4.18, SD=2.108).

Table 10.

**Results of Celebrity Moral Disengagement and Independent Variables of Genres of
Reality Shows**

Variable	B	T
Games Shows	.14	1.68*
Dating Shows	.08	.88
Documentary Soap Operas	-.09	-1.13

n=244
R2=0.03
Prob (f)=0.00
***prob <0.01
**prob <0.05
*prob <0.10

DISCUSSION

The current study examined college student levels of parasocial relationships with their favorite celebrity and non-celebrity on reality-based television programs. This study also looked at viewers' degree of moral disengagement while watching their favorite celebrity and non-celebrity on their reality-based television programs. This research is important because reality-based television programs are becoming increasingly popular and part of popular culture.

RQ 1: Do audiences create stronger parasocial relationships with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?

The results indicated that being a "celebrity" or "non-celebrity" on a reality television show did not affect the strength of the respondents' parasocial relationships with their favorite reality stars. One reason for this finding could be that at the rate that non-celebrities are gaining celebrity status from being on reality television shows, it blurs the lines for viewers of what celebrity status actually means. Another reason could be social networking sites. Celebrity blogs, Facebook, and Twitters account make celebrities accessible in ways never before and give fans an inside look into their lives because of their posts or tweets, which makes celebrities seem like regular people. Twitter for example, is an online social networking and microblogging service in which users can read and send text-based posts. Most celebrities post numerous Tweets daily about their home and work-life. It is common practice for celebrities to post pictures and Tweets about their most intimate moments with friends, family, and lovers, which are frequently re-Tweeted or quoted in other media. People are now able to follow celebrities' personal conversations or feuds with other celebrities on Twitter in real time. Fan mail is no longer limited to writing and mailing a letter that may never be personally read by a persona.

Anyone with a Twitter account can send a positive or negative Tweet directly to any celebrity of their choice because of the unsensored and unfiltered nature of Twitter. Social media in general allows the average person instant and public access to celebrities.

These results align with Horton and Wohl's (1956) original conceptualization about viewers' parasocial relationships with newscasters. Audiences created strong parasocial relationships with newscasters and other live personalities because they address viewers directly in a fashion that appears personal and breaks the fourth wall. In time, these live personalities gain familiarity and, as a result, celebrity status in the eyes of their fans after repeated interactions with the audience. The same is true on reality television. Many reality stars appear in shows that last for multiple seasons and/or go on to join another reality show. Gene Simmon's *Family Jewels* and *Keeping up with the Kardashians,* for example have both been on the air for numerous seasons over the last five years. *Keeping up with the Kardashians* also has three spin-off shows that follow the lives of the three oldest daughters when the predecessor is not filming. This phenomenon also blurs the lines of celebrity status for audiences.

RQ 2: Does liking the various reality show genres predict the strength of parasocial relationships?

The results indicated that reality dating shows and documentary soap operas were significant predictors of respondents' strength of their parasocial relationships with their favorite "celebrity" and "non-celebrity" on a reality show. One reason for this finding could be that dating shows and documentary soap operas frequently break the fourth wall with confessional scenes. After almost every scene, reality shows generally cut to a cast member reacting or recapping directly to the audience about the incident in a formal confessional scene.

According to Horton and Wohl (1956), the conversational give- and- take provided when media personalities directly address the audience creates a seemingly face-to-face relationship between the persona and viewer. Giles (2002) also found soap operas encourage the creation of parasocial relationships. Documentary soap operas resemble real-life soap operas and are equally attractive to audiences in the formation of parasocial relationships. Many dating shows also have elements of soap operas on their shows because many reality show formats cross sub-genres. Interestingly in this study, 55% of respondents said they watch documentary soap opera 2-3 times a week or more compared to only 23% of participants that watched dating shows and 24% game shows that frequently. More specifically, zero participants responded they watched reality-based game shows daily (thirty-one participants watched documentary soap operas daily). Another reason game shows were not significant predictors of parasocial relationships in this study could be that these personae are not interacting with their social circles, but with their competitors. Therefore, while audiences can still be able to engage in parasocial interactions with these reality cast members, it might just be through paracommunication and not something as substantial to viewers as on reality dating shows and documentary soap operas.

RQ 3: Do audiences morally disengage at a higher rate with celebrities or non-celebrities on reality-based television programs?

The results indicated a significant difference between respondent levels of moral disengagement with their favorite "celebrity" and "non-celebrity" on reality television. Although there was a difference, the levels of moral disengagement with both respondents' favorite "celebrity" and "non-celebrity" were low with both types of reality

stars. One reason for this finding could be that audiences hold reality television cast members to a stringent moral standard regardless of their celebrity status.

One interesting finding was that, although only by a small measure, respondents morally disengaged at a higher level with their favorite "non-celebrity" than "celebrity" on a reality show. One reason could be that respondents are able to identify and relate to non-celebrities and thus give them greater moral leeway than celebrities. According to Eberson and Woods (2007), "In personal identification, viewers develop empathy, or emotional contagion, for characters they admire by putting themselves in the place of the characters and imagining how they would respond in similar scenarios" (p. 33). When audiences like a television character, they are able to turn off their internal cognitive process and relax their moral standards for the sake of enjoyment (Raney, 2004).

RQ 4: Does liking various genres of reality-based television program predict moral disengagement?

The results indicated that reality game shows were significant predictors of respondents' level of moral disengagement with their favorite "celebrity" and "non-celebrity" on a reality show. One reason for this finding could be that, as Raney (2004) argued, the main goal of watching television is enjoyment and a motivation for viewers to morally disengage while watching their favorite television programs. Another reason could be that viewers enjoy game shows because they enjoy the competition aspect of the program. Many might simply enjoy the prize aspect of game shows. Reality shows, such as *American Idol*, includes an interactive function for viewers at home who can participate in the elimination process by voting for their favorite contestant. Therefore, people at home become part of the reality game show themselves.

Reality dating shows and documentary soap operas were not significant predictors of respondent's levels of moral disengagement in this study. One reason could be that game shows take a relatively small amount of cognitive energy for audiences to enjoy without having to morally evaluate the actions of each contestant on the program. Viewers watch game shows knowing reality personae endgame from the beginning is to win the final prize. Therefore, all of the contestants' actions are a means to an end with a specific purpose that can be morally justifiable. As previously mentioned, on the reality show *I Love Money* and others programs such as *Survivor* and MTV's *The Challenge,* cast members form secret alliances and throw mission to strategically get the strongest competitors eliminated from show. Game shows use euphemistic labeling, such as a "lie" becomes a "strategy," and "cheating" becomes "playing the game." Reality dating shows and documentary soap operas also include examples of moral disengagement, but the uses are generally not as blatant to viewers as on game shows.

Reality-based television programs are watched by million of viewers across network and cable nightly. As Giles (2002) found media consumption contributes to social learning because adolescents often choose media figures as their heroes and role models. Theran et al. (2010) found that for adolescent girls, PSRs with television personae and celebrities were similar to pseudo-friends that aided in transition to adulthood and personal development. As reality television personae are becoming increasingly popular, more are becoming role models for adolescents and teens. Beyond being role models for many viewers, reality television also teaches adolescents and teens what is acceptable behavior in society. Reality television is the only access some people have to different minority groups. Reality television is full of gender and racial typecasts

that only perpetuate pre-existing stereotypes. Moreover, women are constantly sexually objectified on reality television. Disturbingly, many of the women on *Jersey Shore* that are kicked out of the house after having a one night stand with one of the cast members actually sign releases so that their faces are not blurred on the show.

Reality television also influences cultural identity with the amount of sex and fighting that occurs on these programs. According to Turner (2005), "Youth audiences are high consumers of celebrity, and celebrity is now a standard by-product of the promotion of the [reality] TV [documentary] soap opera" (p. 418). Audiences expect conflict, sexual adventure and the pleasure of voyeurism when they consume reality television (Turner, 2005). The highlight of many reality television programs is the season finale, which for most shows is full of drama and conflict. On most season finales, cast members reunite months later to talk about and confront other cast members about the aired footage. On all seven seasons of *Bad Girls Club*, for example, there is a least one physical altercation between cast members over comment made during confessionals. Finales have become a let down to viewers if there is no fighting that in some cases, as with Evelyn and Tami on *Basketball Wives*, ended in a lawsuit.

Reality personae are becoming part of the social network people have today. The line of reality television becomes and reality becomes blurred, as personae are now attainable by fans through social media. People can realistically seek to meet their favorite celebrities or at least know where to find them by following their Facebook or Twitter posts. If viewers of reality television are able to morally disengage in the media world for enjoyment, it can be assumed as reality television is increasingly becoming part

of pop culture that it is only a matter of time before people also disengage in the real world to enjoy life.

Limitations

First, the use of a college student convenience sample limits the ability to generalize the findings to the rest of the population. The sample used in this study did reflect the diversity of the college population, which was overwhelmingly white (83.6%) and female (78.3%), but those statistics are not generable to the population at large. Moreover, this study was completed at a major southern university and results might have been geographically affected. Of the participants in this study, only 18% of respondents identified themselves as Democrats.

Next, although the definition of a celebrity was clearly defined in the instruction portion of the survey, some respondents still were unsure if their favorite reality stars were indeed famous before being on a reality show. This is a clear discriminant validity issue because there was not a clear distinction for some people to whether a persona was a celebrity or not. For example, as found in Table 1 respondents named reality personae such as Kim Kardashian, Snooki, Terrell Owens and Jessica Simpson as both a "celebrity" and "non-celebrity." Future researchers might benefit from asking respondents more in-depth questions of why they chose that celebrity or non-celebrity for the purpose of the survey.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study exposes how little is known about reality television and its effects and implications on viewers and the relationships they have with shows and characters. The results of this study have established that more research must be done to further extrapolate on reality television, parasocial relationships, and moral disengagement. By engaging in this kind of discourse it can act as an impetus for all media scholars to come together and begin to understand the possible implications that television's newest programming, reality television, has on society. It is the hope that future studies will uncover and bring to the forefront the interpersonal relationships reality television viewers have with genres of reality shows and characters. Moreover, future researchers should explore the real life implications of the relationship viewers have with their favorite non-celebrity and celebrity on reality-based television programs. As reality television is becoming increasingly popular and part of pop culture, it is important to not only research the effects these personae have on viewers, but also media culture and how it supports or contradicts past literature. Future studies should also address other factors, such as gender, race, frequency of watching reality television, and ideology. Future work will be able to add to the substance of this discourse both theoretically and empirically.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY TOOL

Implied informed consent form for mass communication research

Nicole Henry
Louisiana State University

Title of project: Celebrity versus non-celebrity: Parasocial relationships with reality-based character.

1. Discomforts and risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

2. Duration: It will take about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

3. Statement of privacy: No identifying information will be included on any of the answers that you provide. If this research is published, no information that would indentify you will be included since your name is in no way linked to your responses. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by third parties.

4. Right to ask questions: You have the right to ask questions at any point in time about research. The person in charge answer your questions. Contact Nicole Henry at nhenry2@lsu.edu with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU International Review Board.

5. Compensation: Participation is purely voluntary and no compensation will be provided for participation.

6. Voluntary participation: Your do not have to participate in this research nor do you have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You can stop your participation at any time.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study.

Completion and return of the study implies that you are 18 years of age or older, have read the information in this form, and consent to participate in the research.
_____

Please indicate how frequently you use the following media.

Never Less than Once a Month   Once a Month   2-3 Times a Month   Once a Week 2-3 Times a Week Daily

          Internet

Television
Newspaper
Magazines
Radio

Please indicate how frequently you do the following.

Never   Less than Once a Month   Once a Month   2-3 Times a Month   Once a Week
2-3 Times a Week   Daily

Do you watch reality-based programs on network television (i.e. Fox, ABC, CBS, NBC, CW)?
Do you watch reality-based programs on cable television (i.e. TBS, VH1, Bravo, etc)?
Do you watch reality-based game shows (e.g. Survivor, The Biggest Loser)?
Do you watch reality based dating shows (e.g. The Bachelor, Flavor of Love)?
Do you watch reality-based documentary soap operas (e.g. Jersey Shore, The Real Housewives of Orange County)?
Do you Tivo or DVR reality-based programs?
Do you watch reality-based television programs online (including Netflix)?
Do you watch a repeat episode of your favorite reality-based television programs?
Do you buy a season of your favorite reality-based television shows on DVD?
Do you read gossip magazines about celebrities?
Do you go onto gossip websites about celebrities?

For the next portions of the survey, a *celebrity* refers to someone that was famous before being on a reality-based TV program (e.g. Ozzy Ozbourne, Anna Nicole Smith, Flavor Flav, Chad Ochocinco).

Who is your favorite *"Non-celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program?

Thinking about your favorite *"Non-celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program, please rate how much you agree with each of the following statements.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree   Undecided   Somewhat Agree
Strongly Agree

I carefully follow the behavior of my favorite non-celebrity's behavior.
I carefully think about why my favorite non-celebrity does certain things s/he did.
I kept wondering if I know people that are similar to my favorite non-celebrity.
There are certain aspects of my favorite non-celebrity that I really like or dislike.
I keep asking myself how things would evolve around my favorite non-celebrity.
Occasionally, I wondered if my favorite non-celebrity is similar to me or not.
Sometimes I really love my favorite non-celebrity for what he/she does.
If my favorite non-celebrity feels bad, I feel bad as well; if my favorite non-celebrity feels good, I feel good as well.

My favorite non-celebrity leaves me rather sober and unaffected.
Whatever my favorite non-celebrity speaks, I stop what I am doing to listen to him/her.
Occasionally, I say something to my favorite non-celebrity on impulse.
Sometimes I feel like speaking out on my favorite non-celebrity.
I often search for information about my favorite non-celebrity on a reality-based TV show in magazines, online, and in other television shows or films.
I follow my favorite non-celebrity on a reality-based TV show on Twitter.

Who is your favorite *"Celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program?

Thinking about your favorite *"Celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program, please rate how much you agree with each other following statements.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree   Undecided   Somewhat Agree   Strongly Agree

It is alright for my favorite non-celebrity to fight to protect his/her friends.
It's ok for my favorite non-celebrity to steal to take care of his/her family's needs.
It's ok for my favorite non-celebrity to attack someone who threatens his/her family's honor.
It is alright for my favorite non-celebrity to lie to keep his/her friends out of trouble.
When my favorite non-celebrity talks about people behind their backs is just part of the game.
It is not bad for my favorite non-celebrity to "get high" once in a while.
If my favorite non-celebrity is living under bad conditions, they cannot be blamed for behaving aggressively.
If my favorite non-celebrity is pressured into doing something, they shouldn't be blamed for it.
My favorite non-celebrity cannot be blamed for misbehaving if their friends pressured them to do it.
If my favorite non-celebrity misbehaves on television, it's the writers and producer's fault.
My favorite non-celebrity is not at fault for misbehaving on television if their cast members mistreat them.
It is ok for my favorite non-celebrity to treat badly someone who behaved like a "worm."

Who is your favorite *"Celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program?

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree   Undecided   Somewhat Agree   Strongly Agree

I carefully follow the behavior of my favorite celebrity's behavior.
I carefully think about why my favorite celebrity does certain things s/he did.
I kept wondering if I know people that are similar to my favorite celebrity.

There are certain aspects of my favorite celebrity that I really like or dislike.
I keep asking myself how things would evolve around my favorite celebrity.
Occasionally, I wondered if my favorite celebrity is similar to me or not.
Sometimes I really love my favorite celebrity for what he/she does.
If my favorite non-celebrity feels bad, I feel bad as well; if my favorite celebrity feels good, I feel good as well.
My favorite celebrity leaves me rather sober and unaffected.
Whatever my favorite celebrity speaks, I stop what I am doing to listen to him/her.
Occasionally, I say something to my favorite celebrity on impulse.
Sometimes I feel like speaking out on my favorite celebrity.
I often search for information about my favorite celebrity on a reality-based TV show in magazines, online, and in other television shows or films.
I follow my favorite celebrity on a reality-based TV show on Twitter.

Thinking about your favorite *"Celebrity Reality Star"* on a reality-based television program, please rate how much you agree with each other following statements.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree   Undecided   Somewhat Agree   Strongly Agree

It is alright for my favorite celebrity to fight to protect his/her friends.
It's ok for my favorite celebrity to steal to take care of his/her family's needs.
It's ok for my favorite celebrity to attack someone who threatens his/her family's honor.
It is alright for my favorite celebrity to lie to keep his/her friends out of trouble.
When my favorite celebrity talks about people behind their backs is just part of the game.
It is not bad for my favorite celebrity to "get high" once in a while.
If my favorite celebrity is living under bad conditions, they cannot be blamed for behaving aggressively.
If my favorite celebrity is pressured into doing something, they shouldn't be blamed for it.
My favorite celebrity cannot be blamed for misbehaving if their friends pressured them to do it.
If my favorite celebrity misbehaves on television, it's the writers and producer's fault.
My favorite celebrity is not at fault for misbehaving on television if their cast members mistreat them.
It is ok for my favorite celebrity to treat badly someone who behaved like a "worm."

What is your gender?
     Male
     Female

What is the month, day and year of your birth?

What year are you in college?
      Freshman
      Sophomore
      Junior
      Senior
      Graduate student
      Not a student

What is your school major?

What is your race? Check all that apply.
Caucasian
      African American
      Asian American
      Native American
      Hispanic
      Middle Eastern
      Other (please specify)

Generally speaking, what do you consider your political affiliation to be?
      Republican
      Democrat
      Independent
      Other party
      Don't know
      No affliation

Which of the following income groups includes the income of all members of your
family living in your household in 2010 before taxes? This figure should include salaries,
wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.
      Up to $10,000
      $10,000-$14,999
      $15,000-$19,999
      $20,000-$24,999
      $25,000-$29,999
      $30,000-$39,999
      $40,000-$49,999
      $50,000-$74,999
      $75,000-$89,999
      $90,000-$104,999
      $105,000 and more
      Don't know

VITA

Nicole Webb Henry is from Boston, Massachusetts. Nicole earned her Bachelor of Science degree in broadcasting and political science from University of Miami in spring 2004. After working several years in radio, television, and documentary film, Nicole began the master's program at Louisiana State University in August 2009. While at LSU, Nicole served as a Manship Ambassador and President of the Manship Association of Graduate Students. During her graduate education, Nicole received an assistantship with the Manship School of Mass Communication and worked as a teaching assistant for MC 2000, Introduction to Mass Communication. As a TA, Nicole was responsible for aiding the professor in preparing weekly lectures, creating tests, and grading extra credit. Conducting study reviews and guest lecturing in front of 400 students each semester has inspired Nicole to apply for doctoral programs and hopefully teach full-time at a major university one day.