The Effects of Psychosocial Development on Parasocial Relationships

THESIS

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Abstract

Psychosocial development is the development of the personality and finding a sense of self within a larger social environment. Researchers have found that adolescents and young adults use mass media in their psychosocial development to assist them in identity formation. Less attention has been given to what role relationships with media figures, or parasocial relationships, have on psychosocial development. This study examines what effect psychosocial development has on the sex of the media figures people report having a stronger relationship with and asks if relationship status moderates this relationship. It also examines whether identification with media figures and the overall strength of parasocial relationships changes throughout development. A survey was conducted with 233 college students where they listed both the male and female television character with which they had the strongest relationship. Participants competed character involvement scales, and complete inventory examining psychosocial development. Psychosocial development was unaffected by the sex of the character with which the participants reported a stronger relationship or by overall strength of parasocial relationships. Identification with character was found to decrease as people began to form their own identities. Explanations for these results are posited in the discussion section.
I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Raquel Amaro and Jack W. Dunn, Sr.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Scholars have examined the effects of media on developing youth for decades (see Wartella, 2007). Conversely, another topic is the study of developmental differences youth bring to the media viewing experience. In this spirit, the goal of this paper is to explore how developmental differences can affect individuals’ interactions and relationships with media persona. This study will particularly examine the effects of psychosocial development, because it both affects and is affected by our relationships with other people in our social circle (Erikson, 1968). Few studies have examined how psychosocial development affects and is affected by parasocial relationships. This paper attempts to identify the effect that psychosocial development has on an individual’s preference for the sex of the persona with which relationships are formed. It will also explore how psychosocial development affects the intensity of parasocial relationships and a similar concept which is identification with media persona.

Psychosocial Development

Dissatisfied with Freud’s focus on the neurotic and abnormal psyches, Erik Erikson chose to focus on “the inner and outer [conflicts], which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity,” (Erikson, 1968, p. 92). In his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson (1959, 1963, 1968) uses Freud’s psychosexual stages as a foundation to describe a number of crises, or stages, that
a mentally healthy person will experience during his or her lifetime while developing an individual personality. Psychosocial development involves two main components – the psychological and the social. The psychological component deals with one’s innate internal drive to interact with the social world. The social component involves the environment in which the individual develops, including all other people, institutions and cultures. Based on this psychological drive and readiness to enter an ever-growing social environment, personality is formed through the perspective of the developing individual (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson wrote that this personality development happens through a series of crises; describing a crisis as “a radical change in [interpersonal] perspective” (Erikson, 1968, p. 96). Each crisis occurs in a predetermined order, although it should be noted that the amount of time spent in each crisis depends on the individual and his or her culture. Erikson suggests that a healthy individual will experience the follow crises in this order; trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair. This study will examine two of these crises; identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation. This is because, until the identity crisis, an individual’s social environment doesn’t expand far beyond family members and teachers. It is at the identity crisis and beyond that those outside the family become an integral component to personality development. Thus, this is where relationships with media figures will have the most importance.
Identity versus role confusion. Individuals in adolescence are tasked with developing their identities (Erikson, 1968). Erikson describes identity as a wholeness of one’s self and a sense of one’s place within society. Thus, adolescents must find a sense of individuality, while also fitting into society as a whole. Identity is developed through identification with people outside the family, particularly peers and role models. This identification is a form of role-playing that allows the individual to try on different identities and find one that best fits with him or her (Erikson, 1968).

Identity development can be divided into four identity statuses: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity diffusion (Marcia, 1966). Identity diffusion is characterized by an individual being confused about his or her identity, but not actively seeking to resolve his or her identity crisis. Moratorium is characterized by an individual being confused about his or her identity and actively seeking to resolve his or her identity crisis. Foreclosure is a status where one assumes the identity given to him or her by an authority figure. For example, a person might become a doctor because his parents pushed him towards the medical profession. Lastly, identity achievement is a status where one has developed his or her identity. Identity diffusion and moratorium are both forms of role confusion, where one’s identity is not yet formed. Conversely, foreclosure and identity achievement are both forms of identity formation. That said, foreclosure is thought to be less stable than identity achievement and can regress into identity diffusion or moratorium (Marcia, 1966).

To better understand the identity vs. role confusion, or identity diffusion, crisis, Marcia (1966) conducted a semi-structured interview with 86 male college students. It is
worth noting that Marcia used a sample of young adults to make claims about identity development. He had confederate experimenters ask participants a series of questions on their degree of commitment on an occupation as well as their religious and political ideologies. Based on their responses, experimenters categorized participants into one of the four identity statuses. He then compared these statuses with four variables, the first of which was a concept-attainment task with participants in a stressful condition, which should be negatively related to identity achievement. The second variable was an aspiration measure created by finding the difference in the score between the participants score on the concept-attainment task and his prediction for what would happen if the task was completed again, with those high in identity achievement setting more realistic goals, than those in identity diffusion or moratorium. The third variable was a measure of authoritarianism, which should be correlated with the foreclosure status. The final variable was a measure of stability of self-esteem which, when confronted with invalidating information, should be negatively related with identity achievement. Overall, Marcia (1966) found his predictions confirmed, with the exception of the self-esteem measure, thus offering validation for his identity statuses. In a follow-up study, 6-7 years after the original, interview participant’s statuses generally changed along the lines of the predicted steps according to psychosocial development (Marcia, 1976).

*Intimacy versus isolation.* Once individuals have formed identities, they progress on to the next crisis. This crisis involves the struggle of learning to form intimate and committed relationships with others. Erikson (1968) suggests that true intimacy comes in the form of people comparing and sharing their identities with other people’s identities.
This stage encompasses more than just romantic relationships and includes friendships, as well. While it is possible for individuals to form relationships without forming their identities, success in forming intimate and committed relationships is highly dependent on successful completion of the identity crisis. Those who cannot form intimate bonds with others will find themselves in a state of isolation. That is, rather than engaging in a sharing of identity with others, a person will instead act based on perceived stereotypes of how he or she should act and will have very shallow interactions with others (Erikson, 1968). Erikson suggests that through experience with different interpersonal interactions (e.g., combative, erotic, enmity, etc.) people will slowly begin to differentiate various types of relationships, and will begin to form more mature intimate relationships (Erikson, 1968).

Beyond Erikson’s original propositions, there has been less research on the intimacy crisis and those crises that follow it. In an effort to examine and measure Erikson’s theory, Rosenthal, Gurney, and Moore (1981) developed the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (EPSI). The researchers selected items from previous measures (Ciacco, 1971; Constantinople, 1969; Marcia, 1966; Prelinger & Zimet, 1964; Rasmussen, 1974; Wessman & Ricks, 1966), as well as generated new items based on Erikson’s work (Erikson 1959, 1963, 1968). Rosenthal and colleagues tested their EPSI scale on two high school freshman and sophomore student samples. As predicted, higher scores on crises were correlated with high scores on previous crises and low on subsequent ones. This suggests that participants were better able to handle subsequent crises if they had dealt with previous ones (Rosenthal et al, 1981). This leads to the
conclusion that individuals pass through the psychosocial stages as Erikson predicts, at least through the intimacy crisis.

Psychosocial development is influenced by a number of variables in an individual’s environment. Most research on psychosocial development examines the effects of those in one’s immediate interpersonal environment (e.g., Vitaro, Boivin, & Bukowski, 2009). However, researchers have begun to ask how individuals might use media to help form their identities (Arnett, 1995).

Media and Psychosocial Development

In his typology of media uses during adolescence, Arnett (1995) suggested that teens use media for entertainment, identity formation, sensation seeking, coping with negative emotions, and youth culture identification. The most important of these in regard to this study is identity formation. Specifically, Arnett suggested that adolescents may use the media to form their gender identities by internalizing ideals of masculinity and femininity through what is represented in the media. He also suggested that the media can function as a source of information about possible careers. Ultimately, Arnett (1995) suggested that with reduced parental supervision, adolescents have more freedom over the media they consume, and they consume media that is in line with their desired emerging identities. Supporting this claim, a qualitative study of young adolescent girls suggests that youth, at least young girls, use the mass media in the development of their sexual identities (Brown, Dykers, Steele, & White, 1994). Brown and colleagues interviewed a cross section of young females and found that younger girls seemed to have little interest in sexual media, largely ignoring it; however, older females showed interest
in sexual media and either embraced or rejected the sexual content. This research lead Brown to develop the Media Practice Model, which suggests that adolescents select and use media based on their perceived current identities and the identities they would like to form (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002). All in all, this research suggests that the media plays an important role in identity development in adolescents.

Emerging adulthood is thought to be a developmental phase that occurs after adolescence but before full adulthood in one’s thirties (Arnett, 2000). Substantially less research has examined how media influences development during emerging adulthood. This is in part because the concept of emerging adulthood is rather recent and controversial (see Arnett, 2007a, 2007b; Hendry & Kloep, 2007a, 2007b). That said, research has shown that video games have a negative impact on relationship quality with friends and parents, while Internet use has negative impacts on self-worth which could be considered psychosocial outcomes (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carroll, & Jensen, 2010).

As a whole, media plays an important role in the identity development of youth. That said, the developmental impact of a youth’s relationship with a media character is growing, important area of this literature. As said before, relationships are an important component of psychosocial development. Individuals’ relationships with media characters and persona should also have an impact on this development. Before we review this literature, a conceptual overview on relationships with media character, or parasocial relationships, is in order.
Parasocial Relationships

In their seminal piece, Horton and Wohl (1956) describe a parasocial relationship (PSR) as an imaginary relationship between a media viewer and a media persona. These PSRs are developed over time through multiple parasocial interactions (PSI) with a persona (Cohen, 2009). A PSI is a momentary and immediate cognitive, affective, or behavioral reaction the viewer has towards the media persona during viewing (Giles, 2002; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Much of the research on PSRs has explored people’s pseudo-friendships, or positively-valenced relationships, with persona such as fictional characters, actors, news anchors, or television personalities (e.g., Auter, 1992; Conway & Rubin, 1991; Hoffner, 1996; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & Perse, 1897; Rubin, Perse, & Powel, 1985; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). A core conceptual difference between PSI and PSR is that PSI occurs only during viewing, whereas PSR exists both during and outside of the viewing experience. This distinction is important, as the function of PSR outside the viewing experience specifically in regard to psychosocial development, is the central question of this study.

When discussing the media viewing process, there are many similar concepts to parasocial relationships and interactions. It is important to distinguish these from the parasocial processes, as each is similar but brings with it certain nuances.

Affinity. Affinity, or liking, is a general positive affect towards a media figure (Cohen 2001; Giles, 2002; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). Although affinity is highly correlated with PSR and is arguably an indicator of a positive PSR (Cohen, 2009), general liking for a media figure is not equivalent to having a PSR with the character.
Affinity can happen almost immediately and lacks the repeated interactions key to PSR development. It should also be mentioned that recent work suggests viewers can form negative PSR with media persona, and thus, you would not expect them to exhibit affinity towards those persona (Dibble & Rosaen, 2011).

**Identification.** Identification is an important component of psychosocial development. As noted before, it is through identification with others that one develops his or her own identity. That said, Erikson did not explicate his definition of identification. According to Cohen (2001, 2009), identification is the process of temporarily taking on the perspective of a media persona during media viewing. Conceptually, it is the process of the viewer and a media persona becoming one for a moment. Like PSI, identification only occurs during the viewing experiences and, conversely, PSR is an ongoing relationship between a viewer and a media persona.

**Similarity.** Perceived similarity, or homophily, is how alike a viewer believes a media figure and him/herself to be (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Like affinity, similarity is highly correlated with PSR and may be an indicator of a positive PSR (Cohen, 2001), but PSR is conceptually different. PSRs are more than a person’s belief that a media persona is similar to him or her. Instead PSRs are characterized by the affective feelings a person has towards a character based on the parasocial interactions he or she has had with the media persona.

**Wishful identification.** While similarity describes how a viewer feels as though he or she is similar to a media persona, wishful identification describes how a viewer desires to be more similar to a media persona (Hoffner, 1996; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).
Again, PSRs are characterized by the affective feelings one has toward a media persona, rather than simply wishing to be more like the persona.

*Parasocial Relationships and Development*

Researchers are curious about how individual differences people possess may result in different media effects (see Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009). Psychosocial development could be one such individual difference. If that is the case, an individual’s psychosocial development could impact the PSRs he or she forms with media persona. While researchers have begun to examine the effects of mass media on developing youth, little research has been conducted on how parasocial relationships affect development (Giles & Maltby, 2004). That said, research have begun to apply developmental theories to our understanding of PSRs (e.g., Stever, 2011). Research has found that increased attachment with mass media figures is correlated with increased attachment with peers and reduced attachment with parental figures. This suggests that as adolescents develop, media characters become an important component of their social environment (Giles & Maltby, 2004). Intimacy with peers has also shown to predict and be correlated with imagined intimacy with media characters (Greenwood & Long, 2011).

This study examined the effects of two factors that might be important to PSR, sex and identification. Sex and identification are both important to psychosocial development. The sex of the participant is important because romantic intimacy that develops after the formation of identity could impact the PSR individuals form (Hoffner, 2008). Identification is an important process in identity development, but becomes less important as individuals develop (Erikson, 1968).
**Sex and Parasocial Relationships.** Youth may form relationships with characters of a certain sex to assist them in resolving their identity and intimacy crises. It is important to understand the effects of psychosocial development on relationship formation with media persona, because in the current media environment there are far more male characters than female characters (Greenwood & Lippman, 2010; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). This disparity could potentially have negative effects on developing youth, if they need females in the media to assist with their psychosocial development.

In her review of the literature on youth and parasocial relationships, Hoffner (2008) posits that children and pre-teens have stronger attachments with media figures of the same sex, and suggests that this changes with adolescents being more likely to have stronger attachments with media figures of the opposite sex (Adams-Price & Greene, 1990; Cohen, 1999, 2003; Hoffner, 1996). Hoffner’s suggestions are valid to a point, because they are in line with what psychosocial development predicts. Those experiencing identity crises will be looking to form their identities, part of which involves being a male or a female. As such, they will be identifying with those most similar to themselves, including their sex. Moving on to the intimacy crisis, these youth will be looking to form lasting and stable relationships. Forming relationships with media persona of the opposite sex will allow those experiencing their intimacy crises to practice romantic scripts in a safe one-way setting (Karniol, 2001). Single young adults have been shown to be more likely than individuals in romantic relationships to form PSRs with characters of the opposite sex (Greenwood & Long, 2011).
That said, a few concerns must be expressed with Hoffner’s (2008) suggestions. First, it should be noted that although Erikson devoted most of his time explaining the development of romantic intimacy, he did posit that the intimacy crisis encompasses more than just romantic intimacy. This stage is a person’s development of the ability to form lasting, stable relationships with other people in general, not just with romantic partners.

Second, the studies that she uses to support her suggestions use age as a proxy for developmental stage (Hoffner, 2008). The assumption in studies that developmental stage and corresponding predicted age are interchangeable is common but concerning, because every individual develops differently (Krcmar, 2013).

Finally, not all of the empirical evidence supports these claims. Cohen (2003) reports males were likely to select males as their favorite character, whereas females only select females around 50 percent of the time. This could be a result of relationship status, as relationship status has been shown to predict females’ interests in persona (Karniol, 2001). In addition, Cohen’s (2003) sample consisted of adults over the age of 25. According to Erikson (1968), these individuals should be beyond the intimacy crisis; however, the results are consistent with what we would expect from adolescents.

Clearly, a more systematic approach to these suggestions is necessary. Since Hoffner’s suggestions are theoretically sound, it is predicted that developmental phase will moderate the relationship between participant sex and persona sex, such that:

H1a: Participants in the identity stage will have stronger PSRs with persona of the same sex than with those of the opposite sex.
H1b: Participants in the intimacy stage will have stronger PSRs with persona of the opposite sex than with those of the same sex.

Previous research suggests that relationship status could moderate the relationship between participant sex and the sex of the persona with which the participant forms a stronger relationship (Greenwood & Long, 2011; Karniol, 2001). That said, psychosocial development has not been factored into this relationship.

RQ1: What effect does a participant’s relationship status have on the interaction between psychosocial development, participant sex, and the sex of the persona with which the participant forms a stronger relationship?

**Identification and Parasocial Relationships.** As Erikson (1968) noted, “[A]dolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one’s identity by projecting one’s diffused self-image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified,” (p. 132). We could expect that those in the identity crisis will not have as strong of PSRs with their favorite media persona, because they are looking for themselves in the persona. Along with this notion, those individuals in the identity crisis are more likely to spend their media viewing experience identifying with the persona, rather than forming PSRs. This is because those experiencing the identity crisis must identity with non-family leader figures and heroes, and favorite media persona could definitely be categorized as such. Since PSRs are developed on PSIs with media persona, one would expect weaker PSRs, if more time is spent identifying with the persona than is spent interacting with them.
H2: Participants in the identity stage will have higher levels of identification with persona than will participants in the intimacy stage.

Having completed their identity crises, those with who have moved on to the intimacy crisis should be expected to begin practicing “sharing” their new found identities with others. One outlet for this practice could be with their favorite media persona (Hoffner, 2008). Also, without a need to identify with the persona to try out his or her identity, more of the media viewing experience could be devoted to interacting with the persona (PSI). As such, it is predicted that:

H3: Participants in the intimacy stage will have higher levels of PSR with persona than participants in the identity stage.

*Perceived Similarity and Wishful Identification.* Finally, it is also plausible that perceived similarity and wishful identification could play important roles in the relationship between psychosocial development and strength of PSR. Although researchers do not know much about the cognitive effort and resources that go into wishful identification, if they are similar to identification then they should reduce over time and allow for more PSI with media persona. Perceived similarity, on the other hand, may increase over time since individuals will have a more solid concept of their identities to compare with the personas.

RQ2: Does perceived similarity interact with participant’s psychosocial stage to influence strength of PSR?

RQ3: Does wishful identification interact with participant’s psychosocial stage to influence strength of PSR?
Chapter 2: Method

Participants

Two hundred ninety-one college students in a communication research pool took an online survey via Qualtrics, and were compensated for their time with class credit (see Appendix A for recruitment advertisement). Quota sampling by sex was employed, since sex was an important variable in this study. Only those participants who completed the study were included in analyses ($n = 267$). Next, since the hypotheses assume heterosexual psychosocial development, non-heterosexual participants ($n = 15$) were also removed from the sample. Then, since the hypotheses assume that individuals will be in the identity or intimacy crisis, participants age of 30 or older ($n = 5$), who Erikson predicted should have resolved these crises, were removed from further analyses. Finally, those who completed the survey in less than 419 seconds ($n = 13$) were not included in the analyses. This time was determined by how quickly the researcher who developed the survey could complete it, which took 420 seconds. In the end, 233 participants (Age $M = 20.42$, $SD = 2.03$; 54.9% female; 71.2% Caucasian, 6.9% Black, 14.2% Asian, 5.2% Hispanic, 2.6% Multi-racial) were included in the analyses.

Procedure

Participants were informed that they were completing a study to examine the effects of human development on media preferences (see Appendix B to view the full
consent form). Once consent was acquired, participants were asked to indicate a male or female television character with which they had a strong bond, and to provide information about the series that character was from, as well as the sex, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of the character. Participants then filled out character involvement scales about the selected character, which included the Parasocial Interaction (PSI) scale (Perse & Rubin, 1987), the Identification scale (Cohen, 2001), the Perceived Homophily scale (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975), and the Wishful Identification scale (Hoffner, 1996).

Participants were then asked to name a character of the opposite gender from the first selected character with which they had a strong bond, to provide the same demographic information for that character, and complete the character involvement scales. The gender of the character asked first was counterbalanced to ensure that order of gender of character would not affect the results. Next, participants were asked to indicate with which of the two characters they believe they have a stronger bond.

Participants then completed the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (EPSI; Rosenthal et al, 1981). Finally, they were asked to provide demographic information about themselves and information on their relationship status and satisfaction. The survey was designed to be completed in 20 minutes. For a complete list of items on the survey, see Appendix C.

**Measures**

*Character Information.* For each character, participants were asked to respond to questions indicating the name of the character, the name of the series the character was
from, age, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation of the character. Participants were also asked how often and how long they had watched the show in which the character was featured.

Two hundred thirty-three different male characters were listed. The 4 most frequently mentioned male characters were Ted Mosby from *How I Met Your Mother* (*n* = 12), Nathan Scott from *One Tree Hill* (*n* = 12), Jim Halpert from *The Office* (*n* = 9), and Michael Scott from *The Office* (*n* = 6). The mode age listed for male characters was 26-35 years old (*n* = 96), followed by 18-25 years old (*n* = 71) and 36-49 years old (*n* = 41). The ethnicity of the character was 85.0% Caucasian, 1.3% Native American, 6.4% Black, 3.4% Asian, .4% Hispanic, .4% Multi-racial, and 3% of the participants did not know the character ethnicity.

One hundred eleven different female characters were listed. The 4 most frequently mentioned female characters were Leslie Knope from *Parks and Recreation* (*n* = 12), Jessica Day from *New Girl* (*n* = 9), Brooke Davis from *One Tree Hill* (*n* = 9), and Olivia Pope from *Scandal* (*n* = 9). The mode age listed for female characters was 26-35 years old (*n* = 106), followed by 18-25 years old (*n* = 74) and 36-49 years old (*n* = 31). The ethnicity of the character was 79.0% Caucasian, 1.3% Native American, 9.4% Black, 5.6% Asian, 0% Hispanic, 1.3% Multi-racial, and 8% of the participants did not know the character ethnicity.

*Parasocial Relationship.* To measure PSR with the television characters, participants completed an adjusted version of the 10-item PSI scale (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Despite being called the PSI scale, this measure is a better indicator of PSR, with
its focus on the relationship with the persona. An example item included in the scale is “I miss [name] when he or she is not in an episode.”

First used to measure PSI with news anchors, the PSI scale, originally 20-items, was shown to be reliable ($M = 2.70, \alpha = .93$; Rubin et al, 1985). The practice of adjusting the PSI is quite common, as in subsequent studies, researchers adjusted the scale to examining PSI with favorite television personality ($\alpha = .88$; Rubin & McHugh, 1987) and with a television character ($\alpha = .81$; Auter, 1992). Later the PSI scale was reduced to 10-items. This version of the scale was also shown to be reliable ($\alpha = .88$) and highly correlated with the original scale ($r = .96$; Rubin & Perse, 1897). This version is also commonly adjusted and has been used to examine PSI with soap opera characters ($\alpha = .85$; Perse & Rubin, 1989) and favorite television personality ($\alpha = .90$; Conway & Rubin, 1991). Factor analysis also suggest that the scale is univariate with a single-factor solution explaining 46% of the variance in the 20-item scale (Rubin et al, 1985), and 55% of the variance in the 10-item scale (Rubin & Perse, 1897).

For this study, participants were asked to respond to the 10 items on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The PSI scale was completed both for male characters ($M = 5.55, SD = .79, \alpha = .79$) and female characters ($M = 5.55, SD = .83, \alpha = .85$).

The PSI scale should have indicated with which character the participant has a stronger bond, as one of the mean scores should be higher than the other. Participants were also asked the following question, “Which character do you feel you have a stronger bond with?” Participants were presented with both characters’ names and asked to
respond with the name of the character with which they had a stronger relationship. This created a binary variable that described the perceived stronger PSR of the participant.

Identification. To measure identification with television characters, participants completed the 10-item Identification scale (Cohen, 2001). An example item included in the scale is “While viewing [show], I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.” This scale has yet to experience examinations of its psychometrics; however, it has been used successfully in previous studies (Chory-Assad & Chicchirillo, 2005; Ryu, Kline, & Kim, 2007).

For this study, participants were asked to respond to the 10 items on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The identification scale was completed both for male characters ($M = 5.52, SD = .89, \alpha = .88$) and female characters ($M = 5.47, SD = .92, \alpha = .91$).

Perceived Similarity. To measure perceived similarity, or homophily, with television characters, participants completed the Perceived Homophily measure (McCroskey et al., 1975). Originally designed to measure homophily in an interpersonal setting, this measure has been used successfully in a mediated situation (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). The Perceived Homophily measure originally included four factors, but two have been shown to be unstable and thus have been removed from the scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1979). There are two subscales, Attitude and Background, with 4 items each. Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point semantic differential scale. An example item included in the scale is “Doesn’t think like me – Thinks like me.”
Although, McCroskey and colleagues (1975) did not report Cronbach’s alpha, they did demonstrate that the items in the subscale held together in a factor analysis. The researchers also showed that similarity was higher among same-gender pairs than opposite gender pairs, suggesting discriminant validity (McCroskey, et al., 1975). A later study reported an alpha of .88 for the Attitude scale and .71 for the Background scale, suggesting that this scale is reliable (Elliot, 1979).

For this study, perceived homophily scale was completed both for male characters ($M = 3.0, SD = .77, \alpha = .78$) and female characters ($M = 3.05, SD = .74, \alpha = .78$).

Wishful Identification. Participants completed 5 items to measure wishful identification with a television character. Originally developed as 3 items ($M = 3.46, \alpha = .80$; Hoffner, 1996), the additional 2 items were added later on ($\alpha = .80$, for male characters; $\alpha = .84$, for female characters; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) also conducted a principal axis factor analysis on the 5 items, and showed they were unidimensional. An example item included in the scale is “[Name] is someone I would like to emulate.”

For this study, participants were asked to respond to the 10 items on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The wishful identification scale was completed both for male characters ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.35, \alpha = .89$) and female characters ($M = 4.88, SD = 1.21, \alpha = .86$).

Psychosocial Development. To measure the psychosocial stage of the participants, the EPSI scale (Rosenthal et al, 1981) was employed. This scale is comprised of 6 subscales, each focusing on the first six of Erikson’s psychosocial stages, with 12 items
per subscale. The 72 items of the scale are ordered randomly. An example item included in the scale is “I have few doubts about myself.”

In Rosenthal and colleagues (1981) study developing the EPSI scale each of the subscales was shown to be reliable both in the pilot study ($n = 97$; trust, $M = 3.40$, $\alpha = .77$; autonomy, $M = 3.65$, $\alpha = .74$; initiative, $M = 3.59$, $\alpha = .81$; industry, $M = 3.35$, $\alpha = .79$; identity, $M = 3.38$, $\alpha = .78$; intimacy, $M = 3.43$, $\alpha = .73$) and the subsequent test ($n = 622$; trust, $M = 3.40$, $\alpha = .63$; autonomy, $M = 3.66$, $\alpha = .62$; initiative, $M = 3.61$, $\alpha = .57$; industry, $M = 3.63$, $\alpha = .75$; identity, $M = 3.67$, $\alpha = .71$; intimacy, $M = 3.46$, $\alpha = .63$). The construct validity was also examined in two ways. First, in the pilot study, Rosenthal and colleagues compared results of the EPSI scale with Greenberger and Sorensen’s (1974) Psychosocial Maturity scale and found concept links between the two scales. In the subsequent test, Rosenthal and colleagues found gender differences to be consistent with the previous literature (Rosenthal et al, 1981).

For this study, only 3 of the 6 subscales were included; industry ($M = 5.38$, $SD = .83$, $\alpha = .86$), identity ($M = 5.0$, $SD = .76$, $\alpha = .75$), and intimacy ($M = 4.96$, $SD = .86$, $\alpha = .80$). Since participants were expected to be nearing the end of their identity development, participants were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to increase variance and reduce ceiling effects.

Demographic Information. Participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status (46.4% In a relationship, 25.3% Not in a relationship and not seeking one, 28.3% Not in a relationship but not seeking one). If they responded that they were in a relationship, participants were asked about their
relationship satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree; $n = 108; M = 1.5, SD = .81$). An example item included in the scale is “I am satisfied in my current relationship.”
Chapter 3: Results

To examine the first hypothesis, the identity subscale of the EPSI was recoded into a new dichotomous variable, "identity crisis resolution." If the average score of the items in the subscale was less than the midpoint of the scale, it was recoded as a 0. Averages equal to or greater than the midpoint of the scale were recoded as a 1, and were considered to be indicative of the participant resolving the identity crisis. I decided to use the midpoint of the scale as the splitting point, because the nature of the subscale suggests that higher averages should correspond to more identity formation and a mean split seemed unreasonable due to the mean of the distribution being centered higher than the midpoint of the scale ($M = 5.0$, $SD = .76$, skewness = -0.34). I also used this variable in examining both components of the first hypothesis, since there was a strong correlation between the identity subscale and the intimacy subscale ($r = .49$, $p < .01$), suggesting that the intimacy subscale could add no substantive difference in the analysis.

H1a predicted that participants in the identity stage will have stronger PSRs with persona of the same sex than with those of the opposite sex. To examine this hypothesis, I selected for participants with a 0 on the identity crisis resolution variable. Then, I ran a Fisher’s Exact Probability Test to examine the association between participant sex and the sex of the character with which participants reported having a stronger relationship. I did this because the minimum expected frequency was 1.5, thus violating one of the
assumptions for using a Chi-square. Participants in the identity stage \((n = 16)\) were more likely to form a stronger relationship with a persona of the same sex \((87.5\%), \ p < .01\) (two-sided). Thus, H1a was supported.

H1b predicted participants in the intimacy stage will have stronger PSRs with persona of the opposite sex than with those of the same sex. Selecting for participants with a 1 on the identity crisis resolution variable, I ran a Chi-square test for independence to examine the association between participant sex and the sex of the character with which participants reported having a stronger relationship. Participants in the intimacy phase again were more likely to form a stronger relationship with a persona of the same sex \((75.1\%), \chi^2 (1, \ n = 217) = 57.48, \ p < .001, \ phi = -.52\). Thus, H1b was not supported.

RQ1 asked what effect a participant’s relationship status have on the interaction between psychosocial development, participant sex, and sex of the character with which participants reported having a stronger relationship. I chose not to run analyses on those in the identity crisis, because minimum expected cell frequency was below 5. Thus, this would violate one of the assumptions of using a Chi-square. Selecting for participants with a 1 on the identity crisis resolution variable and who reported being in a relationship, I ran a Chi-square test for independence to examine the association between participant sex and the sex of the character with which participants reported having a stronger relationship. Participants in the intimacy phase and who reported being in a relationship were more likely to form a stronger relationship with a persona of the same sex, \(\chi^2 (1, \ n = 105) = 28.19, \ p < .001, \ phi = -.52\). Selecting for participants with a 1 on the identity crisis resolution variable and who reported not being in a relationship, I ran a Chi-square test
for independence to examine the association between participant sex and the sex of the character with which participants reported having a stronger relationship. Participants in the intimacy phase and who reported not being in a relationship were also more likely to form a stronger relationship with a persona of the same sex, $\chi^2 (1, n = 112) = 28.92, p < .001, \phi = -.51$. Thus, relationship status had no effect on the interaction between psychosocial development, participant sex, and sex of the character with which participants reported having a stronger relationship.

H2 predicted that participants in the identity stage will have higher levels of identification with persona than will participants in the intimacy stage. To examine this, I conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare identification with male characters for those in the identity crisis and the intimacy crisis. There was no significant difference in scores for those in the identity crisis ($M = 5.85, SD = .72$) and those in the intimacy crisis ($M = 5.50, SD = .90; t (231) = 1.53, p = .13$ (two-tailed)). Then, I conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare identification with female characters for those in the identity crisis and the intimacy crisis. There was no significant difference in scores for those in the identity crisis ($M = 5.85, SD = .81$) and those in the intimacy crisis ($M = 5.44, SD = .93; t (231) = 1.71, p = .93$ (two-tailed)). Finally, I conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare identification with the character the participant reported having the stronger relationship with for those in the identity crisis and the intimacy crisis. There was a significant difference in scores for those in the identity crisis ($M = 6.08, SD = .63$) and those in the intimacy crisis ($M = 5.64, SD = .85; t (231) = 2.00, p < .05$ (two-tailed)).
Thus, H2 was supported in the case of identification with the character with which the participant reported a stronger relationship.

H3 predicted that participants in the intimacy stage will have higher levels of PSR with persona than participants in the identity stage. To examine this, I conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare PSR with male characters for those in the identity crisis and the intimacy crisis. There was no significant difference in scores for those in the identity crisis ($M = 5.51, SD = .76$) and those in the intimacy crisis ($M = 5.55, SD = .79$; $t(231) = -.22, p = .83$ (two-tailed)). Then, I conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare PSR with female characters for those in the identity crisis and the intimacy crisis. There was no significant difference in scores for those in the identity crisis ($M = 5.63, SD = .74$) and those in the intimacy crisis ($M = 5.55, SD = .84$; $t(231) = .36, p = .72$ (two-tailed)). Finally, I conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare PSR with the character the participant reported having the stronger relationship with for those in the identity crisis and the intimacy crisis. There was no significant difference in scores for those in the identity crisis ($M = 5.70, SD = .77$) and those in the intimacy crisis ($M = 5.68, SD = .76$; $t(231) = .09, p = .93$ (two-tailed)). Thus, H3 was not supported.

RQ2 asked whether perceived similarity (homophily) interacts with participant’s psychosocial stage and influences PSRs with the character with which the participant reported a stronger relationship. I used a hierarchical multiple regression to assess the ability of two measures (Perceived Homophily scale, EPSI identity subscale) to predict PSR with the character with which the participant reported a stronger relationship. First, the Perceived Homophily scale and EPSI identity subscale were entered at Step 1,
explaining 9% of the variance in PSR with the character with which the participant reported a stronger relationship, $R^2 = .09$, $F(2, 230) = 11.43, p < .001$. An interaction variable was created by multiplying the scores from the Perceived Homophily scale and the EPSI identity subscale. After the entry of the interaction variable, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 9%. The interaction of perceived homophily and psychosocial development explained no additional variance in the model, $R^2_{change} = 0, F_{change}(1, 229) = .40, p = .53$. In the final model, only the perceived homophily scale was statistically significant ($beta = .30, p < .001$).

RQ3 asked if wishful identification interact with participant’s psychosocial stage and influences PSRs with his or her favorite persona. I used a hierarchical multiple regression to assess the ability of two measures (Wishful Identification scale, EPSI identity subscale) to predict PSR with the character with which the participant reported a stronger relationship. First, the Wishful Identification scale and EPSI identity subscale were entered at Step 1, explaining 30% of the variance in PSR with the character the participant reported a stronger relationship with, $R^2 = .31$, $F(2, 230) = 51.42, p < .001$. An interaction variable was created by multiplying the scores from the Wishful Identification scale and the EPSI identity subscale. After the entry of the interaction variable, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 30%. The interaction of perceived homophily and psychosocial development explained no additional variance in the model, $R^2_{change} = 0, F_{change}(1, 229) = .14, p = .71$. In the final model, only the perceived homophily scale was statistically significant ($beta = .56, p < .001$).
Chapter 4: Discussion

Media have been shown to have an important role in psychosocial formation (Arnett, 1995; Brown et al., 2002). Less work has been conducted examining the effects of PSR with media persona on psychosocial development, and vice versa. This study’s goal was to examine the role of psychosocial development on parasocial relationships. Specifically, it sought to take a more systematic approach to examining how the sex of the persona with which adolescents and emerging adults formed a stronger relationship influenced psychosocial development, and if relationship status moderated this relationship. It also examined the effects of psychosocial development on identification with media persona and the overall strength of PSR with media characters. Finally, wishful identification and perceived homophily were examined to see if they interact with psychosocial development to have an effect on PSR strength.

Hypothesis 1a was supported since those individuals in the identity crisis were more likely to form relationships with characters of the same sex. At the same time, Hypothesis 1b was not supported because individuals in the intimacy crisis were also more likely to form stronger relationships of the same sex. Overall, it seems that people are more likely to form stronger relationships with characters of the same sex. These results are in line with previous work by Cohen (2003), who found that males were more likely to form stronger PSR with same sex media characters, and females were equally
likely to form strong PSR with persona of either sex. It doesn’t appear as though psychosocial development influences the sex with which people form a stronger relationship, and that individuals are likely for form stronger PSR with members of their own sex. That said, although not significant there does seem to be a relative shift between the two groups, as those in the identity crisis selected those of the same sex (87.5%) more than those in the intimacy crisis (75.1%). This suggests that as individuals develop the need to form strong PSR with members of their own sex reduces, as Hoffner (2008) predicts. Previous literature also suggests that relationship status influences the relationship between psychosocial development and the sex of the persona the participants forms a stronger relationship with in later adolescence and emerging adulthood, with individuals in a relationship being less likely than their single counterparts to form stronger relationships with members of the opposite sex (Greenwood & Long, 2011; Karniol, 2001). This study did not find a significant difference in PSR strength with either sex based on relationship status. As a whole, these results suggest that individuals are more likely to form a stronger relationship with members of their own sex regardless of their psychosocial development or relationship status.

One reason individuals could be forming stronger relationships with those of the same sex is the homophily principle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The homophily principle suggests that perceived similarity is one of the most important aspects of relationships. Social cognitive theory suggests that perceived homophily will increase attention to and influence from models (Bandura, 1994). Thus, it would follow
that sex and gender, being such large components of an individual’s identity, that person would form a stronger relationship, or parasocial relationship, with someone of their same sex. That said, research has also shown that there may not be a connection between perceived homophily and the sex of a media figure (Hutchinson, 1982). Future research should examine if homophily increases PSI with characters and if it increases the strength of PSR.

Hypothesis 2 was partially supported with there being a negative relationship between identity development and identification. This is in line with Erikson’s (1968) suggestion that those in the identity crisis are more likely to identify with those around them in order to role play and experience, or try on, different identities. Cohen’s (2001) conceptualization of identification with media persona is exactly what Erikson would suggest individuals in the identity crisis would experience. It is interesting to note that this effect only occurred with characters people reported having a stronger relationship with, and not with male or female characters independent of the strength of the relationship. It could be possible that since this study required participants to pick their strongest relationship with a male and female character, the study didn’t get an accurate grasp of what persona participants had the strongest relationships in general. It is possible that a number of an individual’s strongest relationships could be with characters of a particular gender. Future research should replicate these findings and conducted an experiment using a cross-sectional sample of individuals in the identity and intimacy crises to examine if identification and PSI share a negative relationship.
Hypothesis 3 was not supported as it appears that psychosocial development has no effects on parasocial relationship development. The findings from Hypothesis 2 suggest that those in the identity crisis are more likely to identify with the persona. It should follow that PSRs are weaker when individuals are in the identity crisis, because identification and PSI, the building blocks of PSR, are thought to be processes that cannot co-occur (Cohen, 2009). Future research should explore whether PSI and identification actually co-occur.

Finally, since there was no relationship between psychosocial development and parasocial relationships, it is not surprising that perceived similarity and wishful identification did not interact with psychosocial development to have an effect on parasocial relationships. As individuals develop their own identity it was thought that wishful identification with media characters might go down. Conversely, it was thought that as identity becoming more salient, the individual should be able to compare their identity with others, thus allowing for increased perceived similarity. Future research should examine how these two phenomena throughout development and what effect they have on PSR development.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

A major limitation to this study was that the sample was skewed towards having completed identity development. There could be a number of reasons for this, but I will explore two plausible reasons here. First, the sample was comprised mostly of young adults, whom Erikson (1956) thought should have resolved their identity crisis. The inclusion of a younger population may have offered more variance in psychosocial
development. Future research should include a younger population, 14-16 year olds, to try to increase variance in psychosocial development.

Second, this study took a rather simplistic view of identity and psychosocial development. Contemporary research suggests that identity development continues far into young, or emerging, adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Thus, my operationalization of identity development could have face validity issues. Contemporary scholars also suggest that identity is a nuanced construct that is hard to conceptualize and even harder to operationalize (Sellers, Smith, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). As its namesake suggests, the EPSI takes an Eriksonian approach to identity development, which offers a rather simplistic definition of identity, “Identity is a unique product, which now meets a crisis to be solved only in new identifications with age mates and with leader figures outside of the family,” (Erikson, 1968, p. 87). Using this simple definition, the EPSI operationalization of identity is rather vague. While using the EPSI is preferable to simply using age as an indicator of development, the twelve items in the identity subscale of the EPSI might not be enough to fully capture a person’s sense of identity. Future research should use a more nuanced approach to identity and psychosocial development, as that might capture a better picture of the samples identity development and how it relates to PSR development. This can be done by using a more contemporary and valid measure to examine psychosocial development, such as examining multiple identity domains (e.g., Schwartz, 2007).

Another limitation of this study was the use of the PSI scale developed by Rubin and colleagues (1985), which has been criticized for measuring both PSI and PSR, as
well as positive affinity with a persona (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Because of issues with its face validity, it is difficult to know what construct the PSI scale is tapping into. In this study, the correlation between the character participants reported as having a stronger relationship with and the character that received a higher score on the PSI scale was weak, \( r (n = 117) = .29, p < .001 \). This disparity could be attributed to two reasons. First, when participants were asked to report who they believed they had a stronger relationship with there was a social desirability bias. This could be due to the homophily principle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Individuals want to report that they have a stronger relationship with a persona of the same sex. That said, the second reason more likely reason for this disparity is due to the aforementioned criticisms that the PSI scale is not tapping into the PSR construct. Future research should reexamine the relationship between psychosocial development and PSR using a more contemporary and validated measure of PSR, such as the Parasocial Process scales (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008).

This study was also limited to examining psychosocial development in heterosexuals. There were not enough non-heterosexuals in the sample to make any comparisons amongst the variables this study was examining. That said, it would make sense that psychosocial development should function similarly in gay and lesbian youth, such that gay and lesbian youth develop strong PSRs with persona of the same sex both in their identity and intimacy crisis. Future research should examine the effect of psychosocial development on the sex of the characters with which gay and lesbian youth form a stronger relationship.
Although this study was correlational, using a cross-section of individuals at different points in their development allows us to infer that psychosocial development effects parasocial relationship and identification with characters over time. That said future research could use a longitudinal study to examine how a group of individuals’ relationships with media characters change over time, thus lending additional support to the findings of this study.

Conclusion

This study found that it does not appear as though psychosocial development nor relationship status have an effect on which persona an individual will form a stronger relationship based on the persona’s sex. It also found that while identification with a character is negatively related to psychosocial development, there is no relationship between psychosocial development and parasocial relationships. That said, methodological issues with measuring both psychosocial development and parasocial relationships might have influenced the results of this study and future research should use different measures to examine these relationships again. Although this study did not support the anticipated predictions, it does offer a little bit more insight into how gender affects parasocial relationship in the identity crisis.
References


Appendix A: Recruitment Advertisement

You have the opportunity to participate in this study and receive 0.5 points of credit in your course. You will be asked to complete a 20-30 minute survey.

The purpose of this study is to understand what effect human development has on media preferences. We will ask you questions about yourself and your favorite television characters.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this study.

You will be given the study URL after you sign up.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact the PI for this study, Dr. Amy Nathanson, at nathanson.7@osu.edu.
Appendix B: Consent Form

Welcome to this School of Communication survey. This survey will take around 20-30 minutes to complete and is worth 0.5 SONA credits. Please allow 2 to 3 days after the completion of the survey for your SONA credits to be processed.

The purpose of this study is to understand what effect human development has on media preferences. We will ask you questions about yourself and your favorite television characters. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey. This study does not involve any more than minimal risk to the participants. In other words, there are no harms or discomforts beyond what is ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological tests. As noted below, if you choose to fill out the survey, your answers will be anonymous. You will benefit from participation in this survey by learning more about how studies are conducted in communication research.

Your answers will not be identified individually – only reported in aggregate. You will not be asked to provide any personal information and will be identified with a survey ID number only for the purpose of receiving SONA credit. This number will not be used to link your responses to personal information through the SONA system. Please be assured that all the information you provide will be kept completely confidential* and never used in any way to permit identification of you. Your participation is completely
voluntary. You may skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering or terminate the survey at any time. There are no significant risks to participating.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the OSU Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251. For questions, concerns, or complaints you may contact Dr. Amy Nathanson, the principal investigator for this study, at nathanson.7@osu.edu or by phone at (614) 247-7952.

We appreciate your participation in this project.

Respectfully,

Joshua A. Dunn
Ohio State University
dunn.492@osu.edu

*Notification about internet security: The study uses an online questionnaire. Although every effort to protect confidentiality will be made, no guarantee of internet survey security can be given as, although unlikely, transmissions can be intercepted and IP addresses can be identified.

By clicking “>>” you are providing informed consent for your participation in this study.
Appendix C: Survey Items
Instructions

Please record an answer for each question. There are no right or wrong answers.

Character Information

Name of character

It is typical for individuals to develop what feels like friendships with television characters. These friendships develop over time through imagined interactions with and emotions towards the television characters. Reflect on all your favorite television characters and in the box below, enter the name of the [male/female] television character you feel you have the strongest positive bond/relationship with.

Name of series

Please indicate what television show [name] is from:

Age

Please select the age range that best describes [name]:

1. 0-5 years-old
2. 6-12 years-old
3. 13-17 years-old
4. 18-25 years-old
5. 26-35 years-old
6. 36-49 years-old
7. 50+ years-old
Ethnicity

Please indicate [name]’s ethnicity.

1. Black/African American
2. Native American
3. White/Caucasian
4. Hispanic
5. Asian/Pacific Islander
6. Multi-racial
7. Don’t know

Sexual Orientation

Please indicate [name]’s sexual orientation.

1. Heterosexual/straight
2. Homosexual/gay
3. Not Sure

Character Exposure

Please estimate how many hours you watched [series name], in the last week. Round to the nearest half hour (.5):

Please estimate how many hours you watched [series name], in the last month. Round to the nearest half hour (.5):

Please estimate how many years you have been watching [series name], with [name] in the cast. If you have been watching the show for less than a year, enter 0:
Please estimate how many years you have had your relationship with [name]. If you have had the relationship for less than a year, enter 0:

Parasocial Interaction (PSI) scale

Here are several statements about watching [name] on television. For each statement, please select the option (1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree) that best expresses your own feelings about [name].

1. I feel sorry for [name] when he or she makes a mistake.
2. [Name] makes me feel comfortable, as if I’m with friends.
3. I see [name] as a natural, down-to-earth person.
4. I look forward to watching [name] on the newest episode of [show].
5. If [name] appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program.
6. [Name] seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
7. If there were a story about [name] on the internet or in a magazine, I would read it.
8. I miss seeing [name] when he or she is not in the show.
9. I would like to meet [name] in person.
10. I find [name] to be attractive.
Stronger PSR

On a scale of 0-10 (10 being the highest), how strong would you rate your relationship with [name]?

Please indicate which of the two characters, do you believe you have a stronger bond/relationship with:

1. [Female character name]

2. [Male character name]

Identification scale

Here are several statements about watching [name] on television. For each statement, please select the option (1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree) that best expresses your own feelings about [name].

1. While viewing [show], I felt as if I was part of the action.

2. While viewing [show], I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.

3. I was able to understand the events in the program in a manner similar to that in which [name] understood them.

4. I think I have a good understanding of [name].

5. I tend to understand the reasons why [name] does what he or she does.

6. While viewing the show I could feel the emotions [name] portrayed.

7. During viewing, I felt I could really get inside [name]’s head.

8. At key moments in the show, I felt I knew exactly what [name] was going through.
9. While viewing the program, I wanted [name] to succeed in achieving his or her goals.

10. When [name] succeeded I felt joy, but when he or she failed, I was sad.

Wishful Identification scale

Here are several statements about watching [name] on television. For each statement, please select the option (1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree) that best expresses your own feelings about [name].

1. [Name] is the sort of person I want to be like myself.

2. Sometimes I wish I could be more like [name].

3. [Name] is someone I would like to emulate.

4. I’d like to do the kinds of things [name] does on the show.

5. I would NEVER want to act the way [name] does on the show. (R)*

Perceived Homophily scale

Please indicate your feelings about [name]. Select the number that best represents your feelings. Please work quickly. There are no right or wrong answers.

Attitude

1. Doesn’t think like me – Thinks like me

2. Behaves like me – Doesn’t behave like me (R)

3. Similar to me – Different from me (R)

4. Unlike me – Like me
Background

5. From social class similar to mine – From social class different from mine (R)
6. Economic situation different from mine – Economic situation like mine
7. Status like mine – Status different from mine (R)
8. Background different from mine – Background similar to mine

Erikson Psychosocial State Inventory (EPSI)

Please select the option (1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree) that best indicates the amount to which you agree with the following statements.

Industry

1. I don’t seem to be able to achieve my ambitions. (R)
2. I don’t enjoy working. (R)
3. I’m a hard worker.
4. I feel I am a useful person to have around.
5. I’m trying hard to achieve my goals.
6. I’m good at my work.
7. I can’t stand lazy people.
8. I waste a lot of my time messing about. (R)
9. I’m not much good at things that need brains or skill. (R)
10. I stick with things until they’re finished.
11. I don’t get things finished. (R)
12. I don’t get much done. (R)
Identity

13. I change my opinion of myself a lot. (R)
15. I feel mixed up. (R)
16. The important things in life are clear to me.
17. I’ve got it together.
18. I know what kind of person I am.
19. I can’t decide what I want to do with my life. (R)
20. I have a strong sense of what it means to be a female/male.
21. I like myself and am proud of what I stand for.
22. I don’t really know what I’m on about. (R)
23. I find I knave to keep up a front when I’m with people.
24. I don’t really feel involved. (R)

Intimacy

25. I get embarrassed when someone begins to tell me personal things. (R)
26. I’m ready to get involved with a special person.
27. I’m warm and friendly.
28. It’s important to me to be completely open with my friends.
29. I keep what I really think and feel to myself. (R)
30. I think it’s crazy to get too involved with people. (R)
31. I care deeply for others.
32. I’m basically a loner. (R)
33. I have a close physical and emotional relationship with another person.

34. I prefer not to show too much of myself to others. (R)

35. Being alone with other people makes me feel uncomfortable. (R)

36. I find it easy to make close friends.

Demographic Information

Gender

Please indicate your sex.

1. Female
2. Male
3. Other

Age

Please indicate your age using whole numbers:

Ethnicity

Please indicate your ethnicity.

1. Black/African American
2. Native American
3. White/Caucasian
4. Hispanic
5. Asian/Pacific Islander
6. Multi-racial
Sexual Orientation

Please indicate your sexual orientation.

1. Heterosexual/straight
2. Homosexual/gay
3. Not Sure
4. Prefer not to answer
5. Other, please write in blank below:

Relationships status

Please indicate your relationship status:

1. Not in a relationship, and not seeking one
2. Not in a relationship, but seeking one
3. In a relationship

Relationship satisfaction

Please select the option that best indicates the amount to which you agree with the following statements (1 – Strongly Agree to 5 – Strongly disagree):

1. I am satisfied in my current relationship.
2. I am dissatisfied with my current relationship. (R)
3. I am currently considering ending my relationship. (R)

*(R) indicates items to be reverse coded