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Para-Romantic Love and Para-Friendships: Development and Assessment of a Multiple Parasocial Relationships Scale

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Parasocial-relationships (PSR) are viewers' imaginary relationships with media personae. Despite the growing body of research on PSR, the field is still lacking a clear conceptualization and precise measure of this phenomenon. The present study suggests a novel theorization of PSR as para-friendship and para-love. Study 1 demonstrates construct validity of a new Multiple-PSR scale using the logic of a multi-trait multi-method approach. Study 2 replicates the factorial solution using confirmatory factor analysis. Finally, Study 3 provides evidence for the criterion validity of the scales. Together, these findings suggest that PSR encompass several types of relationships that might mediate different media effects.

Keywords: parasocial relationships, entertainment, media psychology, measurement, media involvement

Since the early days of television, viewers have reported emotional bonding with media personae (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These parasocial interactions (PSI) were originally defined as quasi-social interactions that span the duration of the viewing experience (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This conceptualization was subsequently expanded to include long-term relationships formed between viewers and media figures (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006). In accordance with this later view, parasocial relationships (PSR) are the experience of friendliness, companionship (Levi, 1979), and "affective participant involvement" (Rubin

& Perse, 1987, p. 248). Media personae are thereby perceived by the viewers' as friends and as a part of the viewers' own social world (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). PSR involve strong emotional responses (e.g., Levy, 1979), and when a television show is terminated, viewers may experience a sense of loss similar to that found in real life breakups (Eyal & Cohen, 2006).

PSR have become an established area of media research. Numerous theoretical and empirical efforts have been implemented to explain the fundamental nature of PSR. In particular, research has focused on identifying the factors that prompt the occurrence of PSR (e.g., Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Greenwood, 2008; Hoffner, 1996; Perse, 1990), the contribution of PSR to viewers' gratifications from media use (Bartsch, Mangold, Viehoff, & Vorderer, 2006; Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006) and PSR as mediators of various media effects (Brown & Cody, 1991; Derrick, Gabriel & Tippin, 2008; Hoffner & Cohen, 2009; Papa, et al., 2000).

Despite the fact that PSR studies have a long history, the term PSR has not been articulated in way that fully reflects the nuanced nature of this phenomenon (Giles, 2002). This paper aims to reconceptualize PSR as an interrelated set of unique, qualitatively different, viewer-characters relationships. Specifically, the present study will focus on conceptualizing and developing measures of two types of parasocial relationships — parasocial love and parasocial friendship.

PSR AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Following the uses and gratifications tradition, PSR were hypothesized to serve as compensation for viewers' unsatisfied social needs. Contrary to this assertion, studies have shown that PSR are not related to deficits in social interactions (e.g., Ashe & McCutcheon, 2001; Rubin et al., 1985); instead, PSR are generally associated with seeking affiliation from others (Cohen, 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999). In much the same way that social relationships grow, PSR involve the development of elaborated characters' schemas (Perse & Rubin, 1989) and entail social attraction (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). In addition, many essential characteristics of real relationship breakups apply to parasocial relationships and to viewers' experience of loss when their favorite characters go off the air (e.g., Eyal & Cohen, 2006). In light of these findings, PSR were re-conceptualized as an extension of, rather than a substitution for, real life interactions.

Simply said, PSR are social relationships that are manifested in a mediated context (Giles, 2002). As such, both "real" and parasocial relationships employ the same social skills and draw upon similar psychological mechanisms. The comparisons commonly drawn between PSR and social relationships are lacking, however, since no published attempts have yet been made to identify concrete *parallels between PSR and specific types of social relationships*. Social relationships encompass a wide spectrum of different types of associations that range from mere acquaintance to love. Hence, it is reasonable to assume

that PSR is a generic term spanning a wide range of relationships that encompass distinct PSR such as parasocial love and friendship.

Consider the following example: the popular website YouTube, allows companies and individuals to upload short videos and to comment on them. One such video includes a segment of an episode from the television hospital drama *House.* In this scene, the main character, Dr. House (Hugh Laurie), kisses Cuddy (Lisa Edelstein). The comments posted by some of the viewers suggest that these individuals are sexually and romantically attracted to the actor and to the character he plays. For example, one of these viewers commented: "I'm 15, and i think he's the sexiest guy alive, charming, sarcastic, classy, and a doctor!" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= FvopC9H5vJ4). Some viewers even seemed to be jealous in the face of a fictional romantic relationship that the character has experienced on screen: "O.M.G why im not Cuddy????? i wanna be cuddy!!!! how can i be cuddy??? why i don´t have House in front of me???."

Compare these descriptions to those of viewers who instead feel companionship and non-sexual affection towards the same character. Such viewers think of House as someone trustworthy, a person to whom they would ask for advice, or with whom they might share their personal concerns. The nature of this latter relationship could be viewed as a parasocial equivalent to friendship. Such viewers might also wish to provide the character with emotional support and companionship. Take, for example, a comment posted on the same website, following a video depicting House's emotional distress: *[…]* "I nearly cried for House...especially at 1:50 when his eyes were all red from crying and he looked so sad. *[…]* bless him!" (http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments& v=gLD0O6Xv6Y&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DgLD0O6sXv6Y%26feature%3Drelated)

To summarize, it is argued here that in the same way that it is impossible to speak of social relationships as a single, homogeneous phenomenon, the definition and conceptual assessment of PSR should account for the various types of parasocial experiences. The people noted in the examples above engage in *qualitatively* different parasocial relationships (friendship versus romantic love). Unfortunately, existing conceptualizations and measures of PSR do not distinguish between these types; instead they examine only the intensity but not the intrinsic nature of PSR.

EXISTING MEASURES AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF PSR

Most of the existing definitions and measures of PSR ignore the multi-faced nature of these relationships. The PSR scale was originally designed to assess viewers' relationships with news-casters (Levy, 1979). Although the scale was later extended and applied to fiction genres (e.g., Rubin & Perse 1987), the adjustments made in the scale were, perhaps, not sufficient to capture the diversity of PSR in other contexts. More recently, several attempts have been made to create multidimensional PSR scales (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Sood, 2002). However, while these efforts have improved our understanding of the *components*

within PSR, they have continued to overlook the potential differences *between different types* of parasocial relationships.

Currently, the most commonly used PSR scale is the Parasocial Interaction Scale created by Rubin et al. (1985). Unfortunately, the items included in the scale capture theoretical constructs other than PSR, such as perceived realism, affinity, and identification. Approximately one half of the items directly address the core components of PSR such as viewers' feelings towards the character and their interactions (e.g., "I think of my favorite newscaster like an old friend"). Thus, although the scale statistically converges into a single latent variable, the face validity of the scale remains in question.

In sum, it seems that despite the well established correspondence between social and parasocial relations, past research did not fully elaborate parallels between specific types of PSR and different social relationships. As noted above, PSR may vary not only in their intensity but also in their quality. Similar to real life relationships, PSR can range from a mere acquaintance to friendship or love. It is suggested here that is critical to make a theoretical distinction between qualitatively unique PSR that parallel distinct social relationships.

PSR AS MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS

Social relationships are dynamic processes that transform over time as a result of ongoing interactions. The term friendship itself encompasses a wide range of relations that vary in their degree of intensity and expression (Hinde, 1997; Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994). However, according to most scholarly definitions, friendship lacks (or does not necessarily include) sexual elements (Hinde, 1997). Accordingly, friendship represents a mutual, reciprocal relationship founded upon understanding, trust, intimacy, and responsibility (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994) as well as support and self-disclosure (Hays, 1984).

In a parasocial context, friendship can be conceptualized as liking the character, feeling solidarity with and trust in the media figure, and desiring self-disclosure and communication with him or her. For instance, parasocial friendship could be used to characterize viewers' bond with the female characters in soap operas: "After a while the characters do become real people, and we are concerned for their well being just as we are concerned for our friends and colleagues" (Livingstone, 1988, p. 70). Similarly, one of the viewers of *The Cosby Show* referred to Cliff Huxtable by saying, "he is so likable, and I get the feeling if he were your neighbor or your relative you'd love to see him come in." (Jhally & Lewis, 1992, p. 37).

However, PSR can also correspond to romantic relationships. The boundaries between love and friendship are often blurred (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1993). Like friendship, love is based on intimacy, trust and disclosure. The difference between love and friendship parallels the difference between liking and love (where love involves a strong desire to be in the

other's presence, longing for physical closeness and need for approval and care [Rubin, 1973]). Similar to friendship, love is not a homogeneous phenomenon. In fact, love encompasses various different types of relationships such as maternal love and platonic love (Fehr, 1994). To limit the scope of the current discussion, this paper will focus upon romantic love, which, as most scholars agree, is strongly driven by sexual attraction and its accompanied intense emotions (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1990; Marston et al., 1987; Sterenberg, 1986).

It seems that a parasocial version of romantic love is an integral part of the contemporary popular culture with a long history dated back to "crushes" on media stars such as Elvis Presley (Fraser & Brown, 2002) and Greta Garbo (Blumer, 1933). For instance, during WWII, soldiers sent love letters to Donna Reed and decorated them with sketches of broken hearts (Rother, 2009). Many recent studies have documented similar parasocial romantic behaviors among female adolescents (Karniol, 2001; Raviv, Bar-Tal & Ben-Horin, 1995; Steele & Brown, 1995).

Romantic and sexual bonds between the viewers and media figures can take less extreme forms and be targeted towards fictional characters, not only the performers. For instance, one of Livingstone's interviewees described her motivation to view her favorite soap opera by saying that "They always have someone good looking who you can fancy and wish you could go out with" (Livingstone, 1988, p. 72). Similarly, some viewers of *Sex and the City* report not only engaging in friendship-like relationships with the female protagonists in the series but also developing some quasi-romantic relationships with the male characters (Tukachinsky, 2008).

THE NEED FOR RECONCEPTUALIZATION

PSR have increasingly become the focus of media research and are theorized to play a central role in media gratifications (e.g., Bartsch, et al., 2006) and effects (e.g., Brown & Fraser, 2004). However, despite the need for a fundamental understanding of the emotional experiences that PSR entail, PSR are typically studied and conceptualized in a very narrow manner that seems to overlook the richness and multiplicity embedded in the phenomenon. In fact, it is possible for different types of parasocial relationships to be driven by different theoretical mechanisms and, subsequently, to lead to distinct effects.

To illustrate, Klimmt et al. (2006) review conflicting evidence regarding possible changes in levels of PSR across the life span. While some studies have documented higher PSR in middle-age viewers, other studies have found that adolescents report the highest PSR. Differentiation among various kinds of PSR could, potentially, resolve this inconsistency if different kinds of PSR are more or less prominent within different age-groups. For example, past studies have shown that adolescents can "fall in love" with media figures as part of their transition into sexuality and as a means of defining their sexual identity (e.g., Karniol, 2001; Raviv et al., 1995). Due to the psychological needs typical to this developmental stage, it is

possible to assume that, on average, adolescents will report higher PSL but not higher PSF than adults.

Furthermore, different PSR can mediate different media effects. As in real-life interactions, distinct models can be relevant for modeling different behaviors. Thus, it is possible that violence or pro-social behaviors are promoted by the PSR equivalent of friendship, whereas cultivation of romantic expectations will occur through parasocial romance. Thus, differentiation between various kinds of PSR will enhance the validity of the PSR measure, improve our theoretical understanding PSR as mediators of effects, and increase the total amount of variance explained by PSR.

The present study aims to provide a richer and a more differentiated view of the distinct types of PSR that viewers develop with media figures, thereby elucidating the diversity and complexity of media involvement as well as the role media plays in viewers' lives. More specifically, the present study examines parasocial love and parasocial friendship as two, distinct facets of PSR. Parasocial friendship was chosen as a core form of PSR, given the long-standing view of PSR as quasi-friendship (e.g., Rubin et al., 1985). This kind of PSR is distinguished in this paper from parasocial love, because of their high prevalence in society, as was discussed in the previous sections (e.g., Karniol, 2001).

A multiple-PSR scale is developed and validated in a series of three studies. In Study 1, a multiple-PSR scale was created using a number of sources that well establish the face validity of the scale. Initially, items were formulated based on a qualitative analysis of television viewers' reports of their experiences in PSR and existing measures of friendship and romantic love. Next, the construct validity of the new PSR scale was assessed based on the logic of a multi-trait multi-method approach. Then, Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1 using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Finally, Study 3 provided substantial evidence for the criterion validity of the scales by employing a quasi-experimental approach to manipulate various dimensions of PSR.

STUDY 1: SCALE CONSTRUCTION AND EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

Study 1 describes the construction of a new PSR scale. Items utilized in the scale were adapted from measures of real-life relationships such that they reflect the PSR experiences as described in the pilot study.

Qualitative Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted as a means for assessing the content validity of the new measure developed in Study 1. The pilot study ensures that the items in the questionnaire properly reflect the ways in which individuals discuss and experience PSR. Responses to the

open-ended pilot study were used to choose statements for the Multiple-PSR questionnaire.

Seven students at a large public university wrote a brief essay describing their PSR with a character of their choice. Participants were prompted to choose characters with whom they engage in PSR. Cohen and Perse (2003) demonstrated that such instructions for choosing a character indeed helped respondents pick characters with which they formed PSR rather than other forms of relationships such as identification. Respondents were asked to describe several elements of the relationship including their feelings toward the character, the ways in which they would like to interact with the character, and the type of relationship they would want to develop with the character.

Responses to these open ended questions were qualitatively analyzed by identifying repeating themes that were then clustered into categories. The themes repeated in the essays included a sense of friendship (e.g., "like a friend," "would want to be a friend of his"), communication (e.g., "share things," "talk about stuff"), and physical attraction (e.g., "sexy," "hot"). These same themes are reflected in items from measures used to assess real life romantic love and friendship (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; McCroskey & McCain, 1974).

In addition to these embedded themes, another category emerged from the analysis. Two of the participants referred to their favorite character as possessing characteristics of a model ("I would like to ask for an advice" and "I imagine what he would do in the same situation"). Since these comments did not overlap with items found in the existing scales, they were added to the questionnaire to fully reflect mentoring aspects of PSR not represented by existing social-relationships measures. Table 1 presents the final pool of items.

Sample and Procedure

A preliminary, paper and pencil, multiple-PSR questionnaire was distributed among 90 college students at a major public university (61% females, 68% Whites [the rest identified themselves as Latino], mean age 21.78 years, *SD*=1.33). These students were asked to complete a questionnaire pertaining to interpersonal relationships and television viewing experience.

Each participant was asked to choose two media figures—a figure he or she has a parasocial friendship with and a figure that he or she is parasocially in love with. This choice was made based on the results of the qualitative pilot study that revealed a friendship-like and a pseudo-romantic relationship between the viewers and their favorite characters. In order to prompt participants to choose such media figures, the original Cohen and Perse (2003) instructions for picking a character were slightly altered. Participants were asked to fill out the same Multiple-PSR and the classic PSR scales for a character they "feel affinity towards" (para-friendship) and a character they are "attracted to and in love with" (para-love).

Table 1

Factor loadings of a four-factor solution of EFA (Study 1)

	Factor			
	Friends comm.	Love physical	Love emotional	Friends support
If X was a real person, I could have disclosed negative things about myself honestly and fully (deeply) to him/her	.910	-.049	-.079	.060
If X was a real person, I could have disclosed a great deal of things about myself to X	.829	-.013	-.073	.166
Sometimes, I wish I knew what X would do in my situation	.746	-.033	.030	-.135
If X was a real person, I could have disclosed positive things about myself honestly and fully (deeply) to him/her	.579	.002	.071	.244
Sometimes, I wish I could ask X for advice	.504	.103	.123	.022
I think X could be a friend of mine	.384	-.265	-.003	.209
I find X very attractive physically	.147	-.932	-.045	-.063
I think X is quite handsome/pretty	.082	-.869	-.049	.079
X is very sexy looking	-.133	-.828	.069	.089
X fits my ideal standards of physical beauty/handsomeness	-.115	-.746	.167	.082
I want X physically, emotionally, and mentally.	-.046	-.235	.872	-.093
For me, X could be the perfect romantic partner	-.140	-.355	.680	.040
Sometimes I think that X and I are just meant for each other	-.050	.162	.661	.129
I wish X could know my thoughts, my fears, and my hopes	.085	-.007	.520	.131
X influences my mood	.073	-.006	.445	-.114
I adore X	.203	-.281	.440	-.044
I idealize X	.160	-.078	.275	.040
If X was a real person I would be able to count on X in times of need	-.085	.005	-.072	.836
If X was a real person, I would give him/her emotional support	-.074	-.070	-.111	.799
If X was a real person, he/she would able to count on me in times of need	.153	-.065	.050	.738
If X was a real person, I would will to share my possessions with him/her	.220	-.041	.154	.633
If X was a real person, I could trust him/her completely	.192	.013	.183	.633
If X was a real person I could have a warm relationship with him/her	.133	-.168	.140	.500
I want to promote the well-being of X	.286	.061	.196	.383

Instrument

Preliminary Multiple PSR Scale. The preliminary scale included 24 items based on existing measures of personal attraction, closeness, companionship, trust, solidarity and romantic love (Berscheid, Snyder & Omoto 1989; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; McCroskey & McCain, 1974; Sternberg, 1997; Wheeless, 1978). These items were adjusted so that they could be used in reference to media figures. For example some statements were changed to start with a qualifier "If X was a real person." Table 1 presents the items for the preliminary scale.

Classic PSR. Participants were asked to respond to a short (10-item) version of A.Rubin et al.'s (1985) PSI scale with regard to each of the two characters they have chosen (i.e., the "in-love" [Cronbach's α=.81] and "friend-like" characters [Cronbach's α=.85]).

Real-Life Friendship and Love. To assess convergent and discriminant validity, participants were asked about their real-life relationships. Respondents replayed to a set of 11 questions about their best friend (e.g., "I want to promote the well-being of my best friend," α=.79).

Most (75%) participants indicated that they were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study. These individuals were requested to answer additional 11 questions about their current romantic partner (e.g., "I adore my romantic partner," α= .95). A principal components factor analysis (PCA) revealed only one underlying factor for each of the scales (with factor loadings of over .80 for the friendship scale and over .40 for the love scale).

Control Variables. The questionnaire also included questions about the character's sex, the name of the program in which the character appeared, how long the respondent had been watching the show, and the viewer's sex, age and ethnicity.

Results: General Description of the Characters

The majority (59.3%) of the loved-characters and less than a half (43.2%) of the friend-characters were male media figures. Only 39.1% of the friend characters but 85.5% of the loved characters were of the opposite gender of the respondent's gender. On average, respondents had been watching the show starring the media figure for a few years (33.65 months [*SD*=30.70] for loved characters and 42.45 months [*SD*=35.50] for friend-characters).

Although they were not prompted to choose a fictitious character or a "real" person, all but three participants chose fictional characters from television dramatic-comic series (e.g., *Sex in the City, Gossip Girls*) or suspense (e.g., *Lost*). The only exceptions were the choice of Oprah Winfrey and Erin Andrews from ESPN. In one instance, one of the respondents referred to a fictional character but nominated the actors who played them: Sarah Jessica Parker from *Sex and the City* and Steve Carell from *The Office* (rather than to the characters they portray: Carrie Bradshaw and Evan Baxter, respectively).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the factorial structure (i.e., subscales) of the new measure by assessing the statistical relationships between the items. In a preliminary analysis, all 24 items were factor-analyzed using ML estimation. Five

factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. Based on the analysis of the scree plot and interpretation of the factor loadings in a preliminary EFA, the analysis was repeated with a four-factorial solution constraint. Oblique Direct Oblimin rotation was used based on the assumption that the different aspects of relationships with characters will be likely to correlate with each other. The final solution (Table 1) resulted in a well defined, four-factorial solution without any cross-loading items. These factors are consistent with theoretical aspects of the measured constructs.

The analysis correctly discriminated between PSL and PSF. Furthermore, the EFA extracted four factors, two of which included items from the PSL scale and two factors with PSF items. The first friendship factor was focused on the theme of communication (disclosure and advice seeking), but it also included the item "If X was a real person, he/she could be a good friend of mine." This finding is consistent with existing literature on real life friendships that suggests that friendships in adulthood are defined by communication and disclosure (Hays, 1984). The second friendship factor reflected the theme of support and companionship (trust, sharing and mutual help). Similarly, PSL was divided into two factors: physical attraction and a strong emotional response to the character (e.g., admiration, mood change).

High correlations emerged between the two friendships factors (.44) and the two components of PSL (.37). These correlations were higher than the correlations between PSF-support and PSL factors (.28 and .25). PSF communication had a low correlation with physical love (.19) but a high correlation with emotional love (.40). Based on the results of the EFA, the items were combined into four scales that have shown high internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha was .89 for PSF support, .86 for PSF communication, .84 for PSL emotional, and .92 for PSL physical.

Construct Validation of the PSL and PSF Scales

To assess the construct validity of the PSL and PSF measures, the scores on both scales for loved and friend-like characters were compared. It was assumed that individuals would report higher PSL with characters that they are "in-love with" than with friends-characters and vice versa. The PSR scores were also compared for the two types of characters in order to determine the extent to which the new scales better discriminate between the two types of characters.

As can be seen from Table 2, in line with expectations, respondents reported significantly higher PSL with loved characters than with friend characters. However, no significant differences were noted between PSF with friend and loved characters. Similarly, PSR levels were similar for both types of characters.

Table 2
Levels of PSR, PSF and PSL for loved and friend characters

	PSL				PSF				PSR	
	Physical		Emotional		Support		Comm.			
	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd
Loved characters	5.4	1.64	2.8	1.21	4.29	1.11	3.94	1.1	4.18	1.28
Friends characters	3.98	1.78	2.31	1.14	4.13	1.18	4.02	1.22	4.17	1.12
T-test for paired samples	5.96 (89)***		4.55 (89)***		NS		NS		NS	

***$p < .001$

Tests for Convergent/Discriminate Validity of PSL and PSF

Next, the PSR scale was correlated with PSL and PSF scales for loved and friend characters. It was expected that to show a good convergent/discriminant validity, the PSR scale would be more highly correlated with PSF for friend-characters than for loved characters, but it would be more strongly correlated with PSL for loved characters.

As predicted, PSL scales correlated more highly with PSR with loved characters (physical $r=.48$ and emotional $r=.45$) than with PSR with friend characters (physical $r=.21$ and emotional $r=.30$) ($t(87)=3.52, p<.001$ and $t(87)=1.89, p<.05$). Similarly, PSF scales were more strongly correlated with PSR with friend character (support $r=.61$ and communication $r=.58$) than with PSR with loved characters (support $r=.43$ and communication $r=.45$) ($t(87)=-2.39, p<.01$ and $t(87)=-1.80, p<.10$ respectively).

Additional evidence of convergent and discriminant validity emerged from correlations between PSL and PSF with love and friendship in reality, since PSR are considered an extension of real life relationships. PSL scales were more strongly (but not significantly so) correlated with love than with friendship (physical: $r=.29, p<.01$ versus $r=.22 \ p<.01$; emotional: $r=.09$ versus $r=.05$). PSF scales were more strongly (but not significantly so) correlated with real life friendship than with real life love (communication: $r=.18, p<.05$ versus $r=.33, p<.001$; support: $r=.25, p<.001$ versus $r=.26, p<.01$). Though the differences between the correlations were in the expected direction, none of the differences between the correlations was statistically significant.

Discussion

The findings from Study 1 demonstrate that the new scales, in fact, capture two different kinds of relationships with characters. Although correlated, these two concepts are different from each other, and capture something other than PSR. Differences in levels of PSF were not discriminative of the character type (Table 2). However, this scale did exhibit

convergent validity when correlated with PSR for the two types of characters. To validate the scale constructed in Study 2, a CFA on a separate sample was conducted. Replication of these results is especially important, given the small sample size (N<100) used in this study.

STUDY 2: VALIDATION OF THE MULTIPLE-PSR SCALE

Study 2 replicates and extends the findings of Study 1. The methodological differences between the two studies were chosen to test the robustness of the earlier findings. First, the factorial structure in Study 1 was determined using exploratory methods. In EFA, the solution is data driven and, thus, should be replicated using subsequent confirmatory factor analysis. Second, in Study 1, participants were explicitly prompted to choose media figures with whom they "feel like friends with" and with whom they are "in-love" and are attracted to. Therefore, one could argue that the factorial structure that was extracted in Study 1 is an artifact of the instructions given to the participants. In Study 2, participants were asked to choose only one (their favorite) media figure. By replicating the findings of Study 1 using different targets of PSR, Study 2 demonstrates that PSL and PSF are two separate concepts, and it is possible to determine for a given character, whether the PSR are predominantly PSL or PSF driven.

Sample and Instrumentation

Participants in Study 3 were 93 undergraduate students in a major public university. The students were asked to participate in an online survey on television viewing experience for course credit. The majority (68%) of the participants was female and 75% were White and the remaining were Latinos, with the exception of two American-Asian participants. The mean age was 21.88 years (SD=2.70).

Participants were free to choose a media figure that they like, feel an emotional bond with or are attracted to. Participants were asked to fill out a set of questions about the character, including the character's gender, the genre of the show in which the character appears and the duration for which the participant had been watching the show. Finally, participants answered the PSL, PSF and PSR questionnaires as in Study 1.

Results

The majority of the characters that were chosen by the respondents appeared in drama (33.3%) and comedy (37.6%) television series and the remaining characters were chosen from action/adventure series, reality shows and soap operas. Although there were no specific instructions to choose fictional characters, only two of targets were real (Heidi Klum from *Project Runaway* and Lauren Conrad from *The Hills*). One of the participants used the name

of the actor (Jennifer Aniston in *Friends*) instead of the character's name (Rachel Green). With these two exceptions, all other participants nominated fictional characters. Thus, it is not possible to meaningfully compare within Study 1 and Study 2 the levels of PSF and PSL to "real" people and fictional characters. On average, participants in the study had been watching the character for over two years ($M=2.14$, $SD=2.33$).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To validate results obtained in Study 2, the factorial structure of PSL and PSF was modeled using the AMOS 16.0 software package. The means, standard deviations and correlations between the scales are reported in Table 3. The loadings of the items on the factors were high (ranging between .67 and .99) and significant at $p<.001$. The subscales loaded well on the super ordinate factors: physical love loaded with .77 ($p<.001$) and emotional love loaded with .99 ($p<.001$) on the PSL factor. The communication scale had a loading of .95 ($p<.001$) and the support scale had a loading of .98 ($p<.001$) on the PSF second order factor. The model fit was relatively low ($\chi^2(247)=712.5$, CFI=.81, $.13<$RMSEA$<.15$), perhaps due to a small sample size (N<200).

Modification indices did not indicate any changes that could significantly improve model fit, suggesting that the sub-scales in the current model were properly specified. To test the sub-factorial structure, an alternative nested model was tested. The loadings of the sub factors (support, communication, physical and emotional attraction) on the first order factors (PSL and PSF) were constrained to 1.0, testing the hypothesis that the factorial structure includes only two (and not four) factors. The nested model showed a detrimental change in model fit ($\chi^2(249)=718.1$). The change in model fit was significant ($p=.05$), indicating that the hypothesized four-factorial solution fit the data significantly better than the alternative model.

Psychometric Properties of the Scales

On this occasion, participants chose only one (not two, as in the previous study) characters. For each character, PSL (physical and emotional) and PSF (support and communication) scales were computed. Cronbach's alpha was high for all scales: .79 for PSF communication, .95 for support, .90 for emotional PSL, .93 for physical PSL and .80 for PSR.

STUDY 3: CRITERION VALIDITY OF THE MULTIPLE-PSR SCALE

The third study replicates and extends the findings from Study 1 and Study 2. Once again, to expand the validity of the scale and to demonstrate its applicability to different

Table 3

Means, standard deviations and correlations between PSR, PSL and PSF scales (Study 2)

	PSF comm.	PSF support	PSL physical	PSL emotional	PSR
Mean	4.60	4.83	4.23	3.18	4.63
SD	1.40	1.48	2.02	1.69	1.24
PSF communication	1.000	.82**	.36**	.60**	.56**
PSF support		1.000	.48**	.66**	.48**
PSL physical			1.000	.70**	.64**
PSL emotional				1.000	.83**

***$p < .001$

contexts, different targets of PSR were used. In the first two studies, participants responded to the items while referring to fictional characters (rather than to actors) of their choice. In Study 3, with the scale was used to asses PSL and PSF with media celebrities (e.g., Tom Cruise). Past theorizations suggested that viewers can form PSR with both real and non-real targets (Giles, 2002) and that PSR with celebrities are a precursor to audience's later engagement with the characters they portray (Brown & Fraser, 2004). Thus, it is meaningful to examine the PSL and PSF scales in both contexts. Although a comparison of the intensity of PSL and PSF with different targets is an intriguing question, the data in the current study do not allow such a comparison, though this avenue could be further investigated in future research.

The primary goal of Study 3 was to validate the new scales using a quasi-experimental procedure. The rationale for the study was that if PSL and PSF scales indeed tap into different theoretical constructs, it would be possible to manipulate one of them without affecting the other. Because friendship is based on interpersonal attraction and liking, the similarity-based hypothesis may suggest that individuals will be more likely to experience PSF with members of one's gender (since gender is a very salient dimension of comparison). On the other hand, since romantic love involves sexual attraction, it is reasonable to assume that for heterosexual viewers, PSL will be greater with characters of the opposite sex. Thus, in this study, participants were asked to report their PSL and PSF with regard to one female and one male media persona.

Piloting and Materials

Media figures were chosen on the basis of an open-ended pilot survey of a separate sample (*N*=22) of undergraduate students. Participants were asked to list the names of media figures that they like or read about in magazines. A total of 14 different names of celebrities were obtained. The three names that were repeated by most participants were Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston (each was nominated over 15 times). The next two names Johnny Depp (six nominations) and Tom Cruise (nine nominations), were also included in the study. High-resolution portraits of these five media figures were used as the experimental stimuli.

Sample and Procedure

Sixty-four undergraduate college students participated in the study. The majority (77%) were White (the rest were Latinos), with a mean age 21.61 years, (*SD*=.94). Due to the characteristics of the student population, only 15 (23%) of the participants were male.

Participants were given a link to a survey website. By clicking on the link, subjects were randomly referred to one of six versions of the questionnaire. In each version of the questionnaire participants were asked to answer questions about two media figures, one who was male and one female (e.g., the questionnaire referred to Jennifer Aniston and Tom Cruise *or* to Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie). The order in which the media persona were presented was counterbalanced. A picture of one of the media figure appeared on the screen and the participants were asked to type in the name of the person on the picture. Then, respondents were asked to fill out the PSL, PSF and PSR measures and move to the next page that included the second media figure. The questionnaires were similar to those used in Study 1 and Study 2, with the exception of a slight change in the wording of items that had previously begun with "If X was real." Since, in Study 3, the items referred to real individuals and not to fictional characters, this preface was omitted. Once the questions on a page had been answered, it was impossible for the participants to return to an earlier page. All respondents were able to correctly identify all the celebrities.

Results

The multiple PSR scales showed high internal consistency comparable for same-sex and cross-sex media figures. Cronbach's alpha for all PSL and PSF scales and for PSR varied between .81 and .95 both for men and women respondents. A series of paired samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there were differences in levels of PSF, PSL and PSR with media figures of opposite and of the same sex. Consistent with the hypothesis, individuals reported higher PSF with same-sex media persona (men respondents with male actors and female respondents with female actors) than with cross-sex actor (Table 4).

Table 4

PSF, PSL and PSR with same-sex and cross-sex media figures (Study 3)

	Same sex		Cross sex		t(df=60)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
PSF communication	4.07	1.59	3.34	1.34	3.37***
PSF support	4.15	1.60	3.79	1.46	1.62#
PSL emotional	2.88	1.34	3.38	1.63	-2.25*
PSL physical	4.15	1.70	5.15	1.63	-4.04***
PSR	4.05	1.71	3.99	1.41	.28

$p=.10$ *$p<.05$, ***$p<.001$

Results for PSF support trended in the predicted direction.

Similarly, consistent with the predictions, PSL, both physical and emotional, was greater for cross-sex rather than same-sex actors. While the new Multiple PSR scales (PSL and PSF) successfully discriminated between same and cross gender relationships, A. Rubin's scale failed to do so. As predicted, no significant differences in PSR levels were found.

Discussion

Study 3 provided additional validation of the PSL and PSF scales. As predicted, PSL was stronger for cross-sex relationships, whereas PSF was stronger for same-sex relationships. This suggests that equal strength of PSR could be driven by different components (PSL vs. PSR) depending on the gender of the target. Since PSR levels are not distinguishably different for both characters, it is less informative than PSL and PSF scales. These findings once again validate the Multiple PSR scale and illuminate its advantage over A. Rubin et al.'s (1985) PSI measure.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

It is well established that media consumers form meaningful relationships with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). However, the nature of these relationships has not previously been clearly specified and demands further theoretical development (Giles, 2002). The present series of studies aimed to reconceptualize PSR as a set of multiple relationships that parallel the myriad of relationships that individuals can form in real life situations. Although, perhaps, there are many kinds of such relationships, the present study has focused on two of them, namely, parasocial friendship and parasocial romantic love. Three studies have created theoretically sound and empirically based PSL and PSF scales. Although the studies involve a small number of participants, the results across all three studies consistently indicate that the more differentiated approach argued here represents a substantial enhancement of the theory of PSR.

Newly developed scales were validated using construct, criterion and face validity, based upon various recruitment techniques and different target media figures, including both fictional characters (Study 1 and 2) and actors (Study 3). Taken together, these findings suggest that PSR is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that cannot be fully captured by using A. Rubin's et al. (1985) scale. A more nuanced examination of PSR types should instead be employed when exploring the causes and consequences of PSR.

New Questions about the Course of Development and Precursors of PSR

Reporting both PSL and PSF can provide a more differentiated and reliable understanding of PSR and foster a host of new theoretical and empirical questions. Recently, PSR were conceptualized as a dynamic process evolving from initial impression formation to the establishment of deep relationships (Eder, 2006; Klimmt et al., 2006). Viewers' schemas, knowledge and motivations and the character's behaviors and characteristics can foster the growth of PSR. Through repeated exposure to the media persona, viewers become attracted to characters (Rubin & McHugh, 1987) and develop complex cognitive character schemas (Perse & Rubin, 1989), which can shape viewers' affective dispositions. Such affective dispositions, in turn, limit viewers' evaluative change as the plot unfolds (Renay, 2004). Viewers selectively process incoming character information in line with their existing affective disposition by being more tolerant of the character's negative actions or dismissing the character's positive behaviors. Reconceptualization of PSR as multiple kinds of relationships poses an interesting question as to how do these relationships differ in terms of their development.

First, the current study found that PSL has a strong physical attraction component. Thus, perhaps, affective dispositions are formed faster in PSL than in PSF, as the later require a slowly evolving psychological closeness with the character (Perse & Rubin, 1989). If so, in comparison to PSF, PSL may be less affected by the moral judgments of subsequent

character's actions. Second, PSL and PSF are likely to be based on different relational schemas. As viewers watch the narrative they create mental representations of the characters and the plot as a function of activation of different mental models (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, Yang & Lee, 2002). Thus, employing different relational schemas can lead viewers to creation of different mental representations and comprehension of the characters and narratives.

Apart from exploration of the development of PSR, separation between PSL and PSF calls for exploration of the different predictors of the two kinds of relationships. For instance, it is possible that people in different cultures are more prone to engage in some relationships but not in others. For instance, Giles (2002) noted the difference between Germans' and Americans' conceptualization of television characters as friends versus neighbors. It is interesting to examine the ways in which people from different cultures categorize, organize, interpret and construct their relationships as well as the ways in which these cultural differences might map on the differences in their PSR styles.

Furthermore, based on previous research (Koenig & Lessan, 1985), different genres, media content and media personae may be likely to prompt different types of parasocial relationships. Thus, different characters' characteristics may have different significance for the development of different types of PSR. For example, the current study suggests that physical attraction is an important component of PSL, whereas Rubin and McHugh (1987) found that physical attraction does not predict general PSR in general. It is possible that attractiveness plays a more dominant role in PSL, whereas PSF can be more driven by perceived similarity.

Potential Contribution to Media Effects and Uses and Gratifications Research

An additional venue for future research is the illumination of different sources of viewers' enjoyment from and affinity with television. It is quite possible that different parasocial ties satisfy different psychological needs and are related to enjoyment of different television programming. PSL could provide the audience with safe romantic experiences that prepare them for future romantic involvement (e.g., Karniol, 2001). Conversely, PSF may be a source of self-exploration and self-enhancement (Derrick, et al., 2008) through a sense of companionship and belongingness. Different types of PSR can relate to different aspects of viewers' identity and thereby affect the viewers' self differently (in line with Boon and Lomore [2001]).

Second, cognitive rehearsal is an important component of social learning (Bandura, 2001). Different types of PSR can provide an opportunity to rehearse different behaviors and thus mediate distinct media effects. For instance, PSL can prepare viewers for future romantic relationships. Although PSL can occur in various age groups, their socialization effect might be especially pronounced in the case of adolescents who have limited first-hand romantic experiences. Through PSL, young viewers can develop romantic scripts (i.e., one's

likes and dislikes, expectations and needs [Simon & Gagnon, 1986]). Importantly, PSL are more than mere observational learning. Unlike media consumption per-se, PSL allow adolescents not only to construct but also to *practice* the romantic scripts through imaginary relationships. Such PSL could have long lasting effects, as the quality of romantic relationships can be influenced by past romantic experiences that mold romantic expectations and self-perceptions (Merolla, Weber, Myers & Booth-Butterfieled, 2004).

Finally, multiple PSR can shape predictions regarding the effects of education entertainment programming. It is logical to assume that prosocial and aggressive behaviors are most effectively modeled by peers and likable others, namely, characters with whom the viewers engage in PSF. However, in the case of sexual-related behaviors (e.g., condom use), it is possible for the effects to be mediated by PSL with cross-sex viewers *and* PSF with same-sex viewers.

While the above questions go beyond the scope of the current research, the heuristic value of empirically capturing the diverse nature of parasocial relationships will enable a more differentiated tapestry of future study. Furthermore, while the present study focused on only two types of PSR, it is likely that many other kinds of PSR exist, including both positive varieties, such as those found in mentoring, as well as intrinsically negative relationships, such as formed with enemies and rivals. Thus, the present study represents a first of many potential next steps towards a more complete understanding of the intriguing relationships between audiences and media personae.

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