Effects of Parasocial Relationships and Identification with TV Characters on Teens

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of "binge watching" and increasing use of social media, teens are interacting more with tv shows, or more specifically the characters. Previous research has identified that parasocial relationships (PSR) and identification impact loneliness, body image, and one's personality and behaviors, but has failed to address the extent to which the effects are positive or negative. PSR and Identification have also not been studied together, despite the likelihood of someone who has formed a relationship with a character to also put themselves in the shoes of said character. My study addressed these gaps and aimed to explore the extent to which the effects of PSR and identification with tv characters are negative on teens ages 14-18. My study also explored the subquestion, are ineffective age-ratings a possible cause of any specific negative effects of PSR and/or identification? I conducted a phenomenological study using a quantitative survey method. I determined participants' level of PSR and identification with their favorite tv-show character and the number of positive, negative, and neutral effects the phenomenons had on them. A strong correlation between one's level of PSR and identification confirmed that the two should be studied together. However, no correlation was found between one's level of PSR or Identification and the positivity or negativity of effects. My subquestion did reveal that PSR and identification pose a problem when with characters from shows rated for an older audience. These findings may have implications on the presence and use of parental controls on television.

Introduction

The purpose of my study is to explore the extent to which the effects of parasocial relationships (PSR) and identification with tv characters are negative on teens ages 14-18. The term "parasocial relationship" was created by Donald Horton and Richard R.Wohl (1956), who defined PSR as one-sided relationships which the viewer forms with a character. Identification, as defined by Cohen (2001), is "... an imaginative process through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals, and perspective of a character"(p.261). In simple terms, identification is when the viewer puts themselves in a character's shoes. Based on the definition of these phenomenons, the potential for effects is clear: when the viewer forms a relationship with a character, who is not aware the viewer exists, there must be effects on said viewer. The first study done on identification involved how it helped people develop their personalities. So, if viewers are identifying with characters, identification will have significant effects on the viewer, especially on their personalities, attitudes, and behaviors. In my study, I am researching under the assumption that some of these effects are negative; the *extent* to which they are negative is the question.

In my study, I will evaluate the effects of identification and PSR on teens together, assuming that if the viewer has a PSR with a character, they are also likely to have identified with them. The connection between identification and PSR is also seen through shared effects both phenomenons have on the viewer. Researchers discovered that PSR affects viewers' level of loneliness, media dependency, and addiction (Eyal & Te'eni,

2013;Greenwood & Long, 2009; Jarzyna, 202; Eyal & Cohen, 2008). PSR and Identification can both negatively affect a viewer's body image and play a role in self-expansion[1] (Greenwood, 2008;Eyal & Te'eni, 2013;Kaufman & Libby, 2012; Cohen 2001;Shedlosky et al., 2014). Researchers have also indicated increased activity in risk behaviors [2] as an effect of identification (Steinmetz,2015; Waylen et al.,2015;Hanewinkel et al.,2014;Ybarra,2016). In connection to these studies regarding risk behavior, a study found there were unclear distinctions between the levels of alcohol consumption, violence, and sex for shows rated PG13, TV14 and TVMA (Gabrilelli et al., 2016). Because of this finding, I will explore a sub-question in my research: Are ineffective age-ratings a possible cause of any specific negative effects of PSR and/or identification?

My own research addresses a gap by looking at the effects of both PSR and identification together and weighing the effects to determine the extent to which the effects are negative. Determining the extent to which the effects of both phenomena are negative will help dictate whether or not there is a problem that needs a solution. If effects are negative to a large extent, maybe the age-rating system has to be reformed to be more effective, or maybe parents will have to be more cautious about what shows their teens are watching.

Lit Review

Parasocial Relationships

Fundamental Research

With the growing popularity of television, Horton and Wohl observed a relationship between the viewer and performer and decided to refer to this one-sided relationship as a parasocial relationship. At the time, most shows were radio shows or sitcoms. Because of this, Horton and Wohl (1956) focused much of their research on the audiences' PSR with celebrity guests brought on talk-shows . My study will instead focus on viewers' PSR with fictional characters in presumably more modern television shows.

Because it can be inferred that PSR with characters in different genres have different effects on the audience, it would make sense for there to also be different types of PSR. Tukachinsky (2010) emphasizes how researchers must take into account that viewers may have a parasocial friendship (PSF) or a parasocial romantic relationship (PSL) with a character.

Effects

Loneliness: One effect of PSR, that I will address in my research, is loneliness. Greenwood and Long evaluated the relationship between different solitude experiences and PSI[3](parasocial interaction). They discovered that in times of loneliness, viewers react differently depending on how they think about their loneliness, but regardless, it will lead to increased PSI. In most cases, the viewer has other-oriented solitude[4], and may form attachments to media characters (PSR) and transport into media narratives as a means of interacting with said character and coping with their loneliness (Greenwood & Long, 2009, pp. 649-650).

Gannon (2018) also touched on how PSR can help people deal with loneliness, except instead of exploring the correlation between loneliness and the formation of PSR, Gannon explored how therapists can use already formed PSR to help their patients. Gannon suggests therapists use characters who their patients have

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[1] the idea that people are strongly motivated to expand themselves/their personalities by taking the traits of others and making them their own

[2] alcohol consumption, violence, drugs, and sexual activities

[3] Interacting with a character you have a parasocial relationship with.

[4] solitude/loneliness focused on the absence of others (Greenwood & Long, 2009, p.646).

PSR with to help their patients form connections between themselves and the character to show them they are not alone. However, PSR can also become an issue, since losing a favorite character could make the viewer grieve as if they have lost a real person (Gannon, 2018).

The role PSR plays in loneliness was further evaluated by Jarzyna who focused on its role during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Quarantine increased the amount of media people were watching, and PSR helped people battle feelings of loneliness and anxiety. As a result though, media addiction and dependency increased (Jarzyna, 2021). It can be inferred that peoples' ability to become addicted to and dependent on characters would mean they may also react negatively when that character is no longer on the air, an issue Gannon also emphasized, and which was further explored by Cohen and Eyal who referred to the situation as a parasocial breakup.

Parasocial Breakups: Cohen (2003) explored how viewers would hypothetically react to their favorite characters being taken off the air and most participants predicted having minimal reactions. However, Cohen (2003) did find that teens reported more intense reactions than adults, females and males reacted more with male characters, and parasocial breakups were stronger with fictional rather than with real characters. Cohen (2003) concluded his study suggesting other researchers take into consideration the genre of the tv-show, since 67% of his participants chose real life people from radio shows or talk shows as the person they had a PSR with (pp.196-200). Further researching parasocial breakups, Cohen and Eyal (2006), found, again, that in the face of a parasocial breakup, participants' reactions would be minimal. They rationalized this result with the fact that PSR are one-sided, meaning they are closer than acquaintances, but not as close as real friendships, so losing them has minimal effects (pp. 516-520). This may mean PSR are mostly positive because viewers can get all the positive effects of the relationship and not suffer when the relationship is over like they would if it was a real-life friendship or romantic relationship.

Self-Expansion: As discussed previously, Greenwood and Long evaluated the relationship between different solitude experiences and PSI. Other-orientiented solitude leads to increased PSI in order to cope with the loneliness, but " others may use media while alone to feed impulses toward self-discovery and creativity and to experience an ersatz social connection"(Greenwood & Long, 2009, p.650). This is better explained when combined with an explanation from Shelosky-Shoemaker, Costabile, and Arkin who researched self-expansion[5] with fictional characters: Humans naturally search for self-expansion, and forming relationships with fictional characters offers a way of self-expanding; when experiencing loneliness this act may be increased and "...may help shape who they become, for better or worse"(Shelosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014, p.574). People's personalities are shaped by the shows they interact with, however, how negatively their personalities are affected is unknown.

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[5] The idea that people are strongly motivated to expand themselves/their personalities by taking the traits of others and making them their own

Body Image: PSR may also impact body image. Greenwood (2008) focused her study on the impact of PSR on Women's body image, specifically their levels of body shame[6] and body surveillance[7]. Greenwood concluded that in terms of PSR, only increased romantic PSR with male characters affected women's body image. However, Eyal and Te'eni (2013), using a *teen* population of both male *and* female participants, instead of the only female adult population Greenwood used, found that increased media exposure negatively affected body image "both directly and through a mediation process involving parasocial relationships with favorite characters…". Jaryzna (2021) emphasized an increase in this during the covid-19 pandemic when teenage girls frequently experienced decreased self-esteem and poorer body image when comparing themselves to a parasocial friend.

Identification

Fundamental Research

While Freud first used the term "identification" in relation to the development of personalities, as identification was further explored, researchers made a connection between it and media characters. For example, Cohen (2001) explains, when an audience member is identifying with a character they "imagine him-or herself being that character and replaces his or her personal identity and role as audience member with the identity and role of the character."(p.251). Fondness for the character or a realization of similarity is usually what prompts a viewer to identify with a character and outcomes of identification may include increased liking or imitation (Cohen, 2001, p.252). While identification may be ended or interrupted when the viewer becomes aware of themselves or when the story is ended, imitation may continue on after, meaning the traits of the character are helping form the viewer's personality just like Freud mentioned in his own study.

Inspired by research theorizing identification and its effects such as Cohen's, Broom, Chavez, and Wagner (2021) decided to use functional magnetic resonance imaging to scientifically prove the existence of the phenomena. The scans showed increased activity in the vMPFC[8], proving that when viewers identify with a character they internalize the character's experiences as their own and incorporate them into their own self-concept (Broom et al., 2021). Results also showed activity "was greater for the character that participants reported feeling closest to/liked the most…" (Broom et al., 2021). This result is in line with Cohen's hypothesis that fondness of a character can influence one's identification with them.

Effects

Self-Expansion: As discussed previously with PSR, self-expansion is the idea that people are strongly motivated to expand themselves by taking the traits of others and making them their own. Given the definition of identification, self-expansion is clearly an inherent effect of it. Identification allows individuals to put themselves in the shoes of another character. This has lasting effects, such as changes in behavior, attitude, personality. For example, one experiment showed that if a participant read a story in which the character voted, they were more likely to vote in real life than the participants who read a story in which the character chose not to vote (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). This experiment emphasizes how the effects of identification can be both good and bad. The actions, behaviors, and characteristics of viewers that a show influences will depend on the content of the show.

This is where current research is lacking: The current research explains what effects identification can have on viewers, but does not attempt to measure, given today's shows, how negative the effects are.

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[6] The tendency to feel a global sense of failure when one's body does not conform to an idealized standard

[7] The tendency to chronically monitor one's appearance

[8] Ventromedial prefrontal cortex

<u>Body Image:</u> Greenwood's study, mentioned previously regarding PSR and body image, also suggested ways identification could impact body image. Among women participants, greater perceived similarity to a favorite female character was associated with lower levels of body surveillance (Greenwood, 2008, p.101). Since, as established by Cohen, Broom, Chavez, and Wagner, identification is more likely when the viewer is similar to the character, given Greenwood's results, it could be inferred that increased identification with a character can decrease one's levels of body surveillance. However, Greenwood(2008) also discovered that "increased wishful identification with a favorite female television character was associated with greater Body Surveillance and Body Shame… "(p.101). When you have "wishful identification[9]"with a character, you like said character, and as suggested by other researchers, are likely to have increased identification with them. This suggests that increased identification would lead to greater body surveillance and shame which is not in line with the other result.

<u>Risk Behaviors:</u> Through Identification, viewers can be influenced by characters to partake in certain activities (Kaufman & Libby, 2012); this establishes a worry that teens who identify with characters who are participating in risk behaviors may partake in those risk behaviors themselves. Numerous studies have been conducted to test how exposure to such content affects teens and the results leave some concerns. One study exposed 2,346 adolescents who had never drunk before to 250 top grossing movies over the length of a year which resulted in 40% initiating alcohol consumption and 6% binge drinking (Hanewinkel et al., 2014). Another study, which evaluated 5,000 15-year-olds, yielded similar results, concluding that adolescents with the highest exposure to alcohol use in films were 1.2 times more likely to have tried alcohol compared with those least exposed (Waylen et al., 2015). Steinmetz (2015) wrote an article commenting on the results of this study explaining how she assumes there would need to be a level of identification between the character who is drinking and the audience member. This makes sense given the impact identification can have on audience members as proven in Kaufman and Libby's experiment. The studies I referenced were conducted using movies/films and European participants. My study, on the other hand, will use tv characters, as I am interested to see if the impact of exposure is greater since the audience has more time to form closer relationships with the characters. I will also use American participants, which I do not expect to impact the results, but I will still be conducting the study with an "understudied" population, and a population in which the legal drinking age is older than that in Europe.

Exposure to sexual activity in the media was proven to have a similar impact on adolescents. A group of researchers measured 1,058 adolescents' (ages 14-21) exposure to sexual content and their actual participation in sexual activity[10]. Most youth (47%) said that almost all the media they consumed depicted sexual situations and 45% said some of the media they consumed did. Among these two groups, 60% of them reported participating in sexual activity (Ybarra et al., 2014).

TV-Show Age Ratings

The negative effects associated with PSR and identification may be due to ineffective age-ratings given to tv shows. A group of researchers analyzed tv shows for the prevalence of risk behaviors and found that TV age-ratings were ineffective at making clear distinctions between levels of alcohol consumption, and sexual and violent content in shows rated TV-PG, TV14 and TV-MA (Gabrilelli et al., 2016). A connection may exist between this and the studies which found that increased PSR and identification can lead to increased participation in risk behaviors. This participation may be a result of teens watching shows inappropriately rated for them.

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[9] People's desire to become or to act in the same way as a certain character

[10] Kissing, fondling, or having sex (Ybarra et al., 2014).

Method

To reiterate, the purpose of my study is to explore the extent to which the effects of PSR and identification with tv characters are negative on teens ages 14-18. Exploring the extent to which the effects are negative is not a research bias; I am researching under the assumption that any phenomena will have some extent of negative effects. I also believe finding the negative extent of the effects is more important than focusing on the positives because it could help determine if a problem exists and the degree of the issue.

Method Design

In an attempt to answer my research question, I conducted a phenomenological study using a quantitative survey method. I studied a teen population, since researchers have suggested more intense effects among them regarding PSR breakups, body image, and participation in risk behaviors (Cohen,2003; Eyal & Te'eni, 2013; Hanewinkel et al.,2014). Teens are more impressionable and their brains' are still developing, making the impact of PSR and identification on them even more important to understand (Jeong, 2018). To study a teen population, my survey was sent to students, ages 14-18, from High School X. The survey was released to a sample size of 900. The sample size was chosen based on convenience; I had access to High School X, and the students fit the age criteria. The survey was made using Google Forms, released to students via Google Classroom, and open to responses for 2 months to ensure enough responses. Because I conducted a phenomenological study, a survey was a suitable instrument because I could ask people to reflect on their own experiences (Leedy et al, 2019, p. 233) with PSR and identification. Almost all of the current research in the field also consisted of a survey.

Preliminary Questions

In the first section of my survey (Appendix A), I asked participants to name their favorite character since one could assume it would increase a participants' chances of having identification and/or PSR with them, and therefore make my study more effective by allowing me to evaluate the effects of a high level of the two phenomena. I also asked for the name of the show the character was from, but only after asking for the character to ensure the focus of the survey was on the relationship between the participants and the character, rather than the show. Knowing the name of the show allowed me to address the sub-question to my research regarding age-ratings. Lastly, participants were asked for their gender, age, and time spent watching the show; I knew considering these factors would help me propose a solution if a problem existed and provide people with more information regarding the phenomenon.

Measuring PSR and Identification

In order to find the correlation between a viewer's PSR and identification with a character and the effects from it, I first had to determine the level of PSR and identification the viewer had. To do this, I used a five-point Likert scale. I made statements expressing characteristics of PSR and identification experiences and had participants rate how much they agreed with the statements based on their own experiences with their favorite character. A Likert scale was the ideal instrument for measuring these phenomenons because on their own, people may not have known whether or not they have had identification or PSR and to what extent due to their possible unfamiliarity with the terms. However, by using the Likert scale I was able to more easily identify which aspects of each phenomena the participant experienced and to which extent, which could be expressed in an average of

the numbered responses in the scale. The use of a Likert scale is also common among existing research in the field.

Table 1. Likert Scale Questions

Options On Likert Scale:
1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

PSR	Identification
If character X was a real person, I would disclose a great deal of things about myself, honestly and deeply to him/her (PSF)	While viewing program X, I felt as if I was part of the action.
I think Character X could be a friend of mine (PSF)	While viewing program X, I forgot myself and was fully absorbed
Sometimes I wish I could ask character X for advice (PSF)	I was able to understand the events in the program in a manner similar to that in which character X understood them
I would like to meet my favorite character	I think I have a good understanding of character X
If character X was a real person, I would give him/her emotional support (PSF)	I tend to understand the reasons why character X does what he or she does
If character X was a real person, I could trust him/her completely (PSF)	While viewing the show I could feel the emotions character X portrayed
I find character X very attractive, physically (PSL)	During viewing, I felt I could really get inside character X's head
Character X fits my ideal standards of physical beauty/handsomeness (PSL)	At key moments in the show, I felt I knew exactly what character X was going through
For me, character X would be the perfect romantic partner (PSL)	While viewing the program, I wanted character X to succeed in achieving his or her goals
I wish I could hangout with character X	When character X succeeded I felt joy, but when he or she failed, I was sad

The identification questions came directly from the method proposed by Cohen (2001). I used Cohen's questions because he had conducted a content analysis of existing research to propose a method to most effectively explore identification. Much research conducted after Cohen's used his method too, being referenced about 2,000 times. The PSR questions addressed both PSF[11] and PSL[12], a gap suggested by Tuchakinsky (2010) ; this allowed me to see if there was a difference in the effects between higher levels of PSF vs. PSL.

Exploring The Effects

In order to evaluate the extent to which the effects of PSR and identification are negative, I asked participants questions addressing the various effects of PSR and identification suggested by the existing research. The questions addressed loneliness, mental health (stress and overcoming challenges), body image, self-expansion, and participation in risk behaviors (Appendix D).

Analysis Process

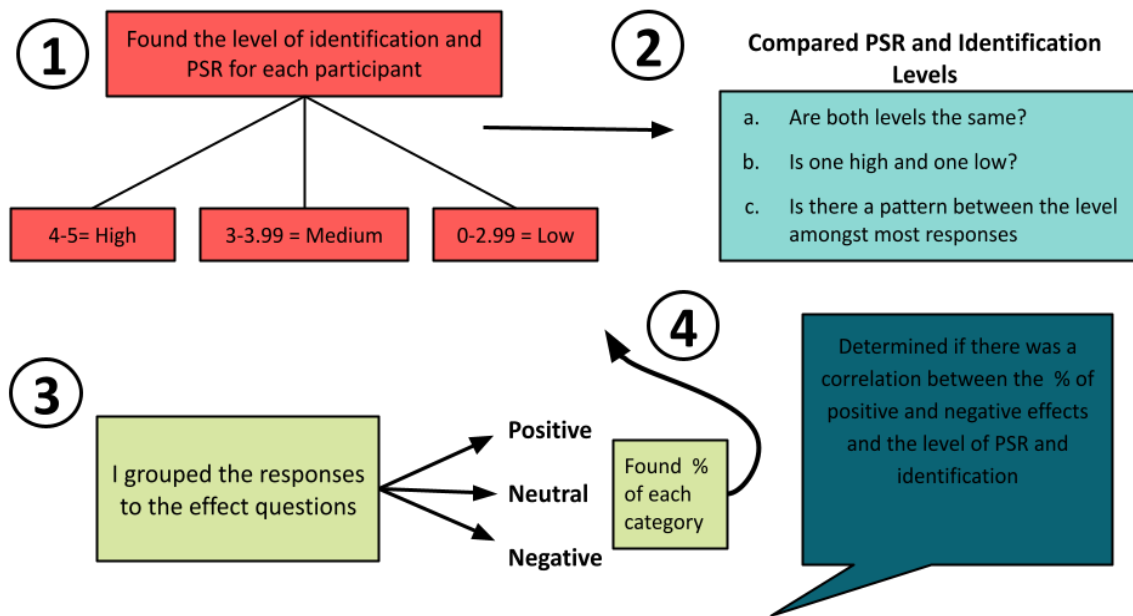I analyzed the data I collected in the steps shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Correlation Between PSR and Identification and Positive/Negative Effects Method.

In addition to the overall positive and negative effects, I also focused on the impact Identification and PSR had on participation in risk behaviors. I focused on the responses to questions 32-35 (Appendix D) and worked under the assumption that if a participant admires a character when they drink/smoke/participate in sexual activity, they are more likely to participate in the risk behaviors themselves. I analyzed these results to

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[11] Parasocial Friendship

[12] Parasocial Love/Romantic Relationship

see if there was a correlation between their responses and their level of PSR and identification with the character. I then used Common Sense Media[13] to address the factor of age ratings. I did this using the process pictured in Figure 2.
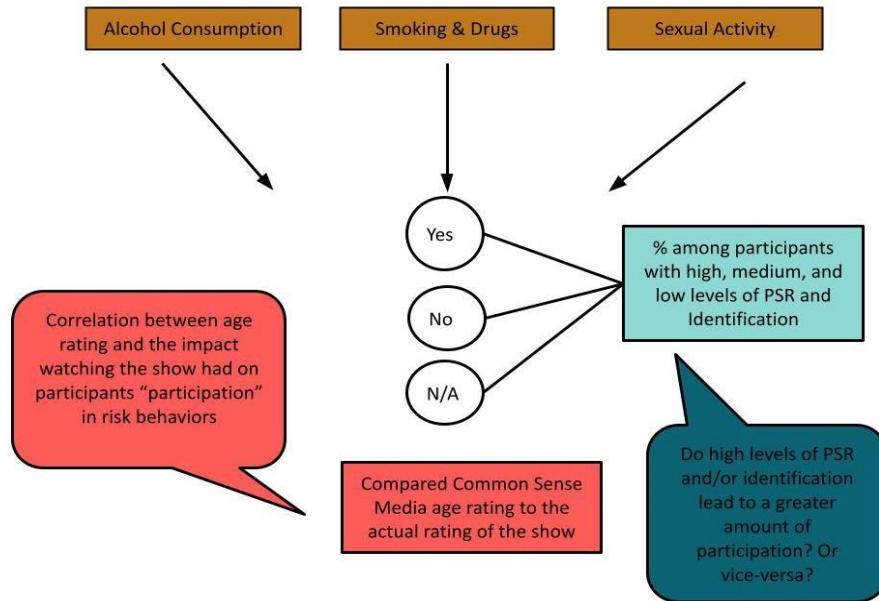

Figure 2. Risk Behavior Analysis Method.

This question was worth exploring because I knew that if a correlation existed, a solution to the problem could be to reform the tv age-rating system.

Lastly, I considered the genre of the tv-shows when drawing my conclusions since Cohen (2003), and Horton and Wohl (1956) suggested different genres would affect the audience differently. I also considered length of exposure to the show and gender to see if any significant correlations existed.

Ethicality

I followed ethical research practices by keeping any identifying information confidential. To do this, I gave each participant a number to represent them and deleted all data when my study was complete. The study was also approved by IRB[14] before being conducted.

Results and Discussion

52 participants filled out my survey, however, 4 participants had to be excluded. 3 participants were excluded because they did not choose a favorite character and 1 was excluded for choosing two characters since their relationship with each character may be different. To analyze my results, I found the correlation coefficient between participants' PSR and identification. The results of these calculations are in Table 2.

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[13] A popular non-profit organization with the goal of providing information on medias' suitability for children
[14] Institutional Review Board- reviews and approves research involving human participants to ensure ethicality

Table 2. Correlation Between PSR and Identification Levels

Correlation Coefficient Between PSR and Identification Levels	
Overall	0.63
Girls	0.65
Boys	0.70

Based on the results in Table 2, PSR and Identification have a moderately strong, positive correlation, meaning that as one's level of PSR with a character increases so does one's level of Identification with a character and vice versa. This result was in line with my assumption and reasoning for studying the two phenomenons together; if one has PSR with a character they are also likely to identify with them. Next, to address the main part of my research question, I calculated the correlation coefficient between a participant's level of PSR and identification and the number of positive and negative responses they had to the effect questions in my survey (Appendix D). The results of these calculations are in the table below.

Table 3. Correlation Between Effects and PSR and Identification.

	ρ		ρ		ρ
PSR:Positive	-0.09	**Female**	-0.25	**Male**	0.16
PSR:Negative	0.06	**Female**	0.19	**Male**	0.04
Identification:Positive	-0.15	**Female**	-0.23	**Male**	0.12
Identification:Negative	0.34	**Female**	0.36	**Male**	0.32

"PSR:Positive" means the correlation coefficient between PSR and the number of positive effects.
"PSR: Negative" is the correlation coefficient between the level of PSR and the number of negative effects.
The same goes for "Identification:Positive" and "Identification:Negative".
In the second column of the table, the overall correlation coefficient is shown with ρ being the unit. In the 4th and 6th column are the correlation coefficient between PSR and Identification and the number of positive and negative effects for each participant, separated by the gender of the participant; the correlation coefficient among males and females.

The results mostly demonstrated no correlation between the level of a participant's PSR or identification and the number of positive or negative effects experienced by them. However, a slight positive correlation between a participant's level of identification and the number of negative effects was indicated by the correlation coefficient ranging from .32-.36. This means that as one's level of identification increases, the number of negative effects they experience tend to increase as well. These results can be explained through the fact that the effects of identification depend on the character the viewer is identifying with, for they are "becoming" the character temporarily. When finding the correlation among a large number of participants watching different shows varying in age-ratings from TV-Y7-TV MA, the correlation is not expected to be as strong since the

character and content of each show is different. This, however, does not explain why a stronger correlation was found between the level of identification and the amount of negative effects than the amount of positive ones. Overall though, the correlations between PSR and identification and positive and negative effects were negligible.

To address the sub-question in my study regarding risk behaviors, I evaluated the correlation between PSR and identification and the percent of participants who said yes to admiring their favorite character when they participate in alcohol consumption, smoking, drugs, and/or sexual activity.
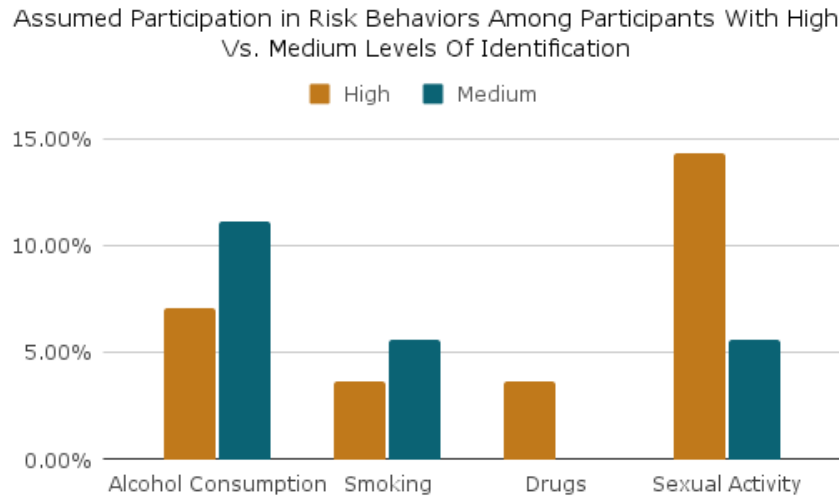

Figure 3. Participation in Risk Behaviors Among Participants With High vs. Medium Levels of Identification. High Level= levels ranging from 4-5

Medium Level= levels ranging from 3-3.99
Low Level= levels running from 1-2.99
Low Level of Identification was excluded from the chart because only two participants had a low level of identification, and neither of them answered yes to suggest participation in a risk behavior.
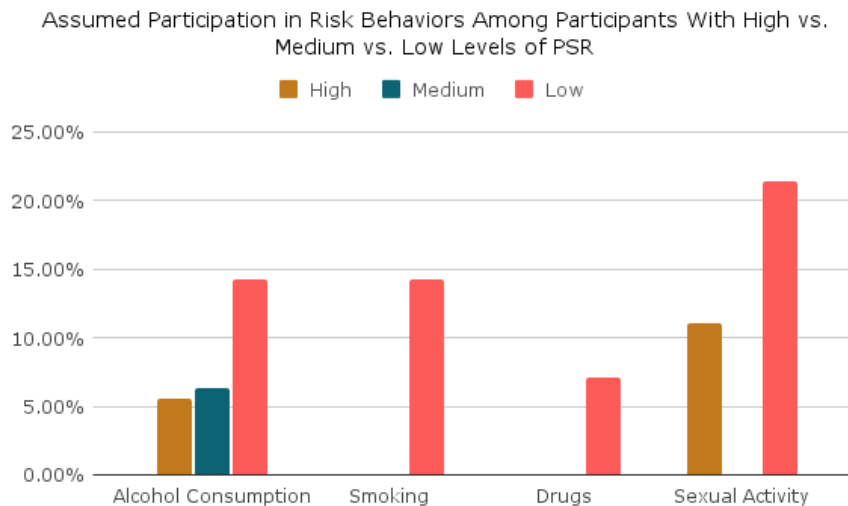

Figure 4. Participation in Risk Behaviors Among Participants With High vs. Medium Vs. Low Levels of PSR
High Level= levels ranging from 4-5; Medium Level= levels ranging from 3-3.99; Low Level= levels running from 1-2.99

Participants with a high level of identification were more likely to participate in risk behaviors (see figure 6). This aligns with Steinmetz's (2016) belief that identification played a major role in studies such as those conducted by Hanewinkel et al.(2014), Waylen et al.(2015) and Ybarra et al.(2015) which showed that after watching movies with high exposure to risk behaviors, subjects' participation in them increased. The concept of these studies justify why only 8 participants suggested likely participation in one or more of the 4 risk behaviors. The most popular response for questions 32-35 (Appendix D), which addressed risk behaviors, was "n/a". This means that most participants were not watching shows with high exposure to risk behaviors, a key aspect of past studies in the field. A person must be exposed to participation in risk behaviors to have the possibility of being influenced to participate. This might also be why 5 out of 8 of the participants who answered "yes" to the risk behavior questions were watching a show rated TV-MA[15].

Because of Gabrilelli's (2016) findings that tv-ratings were ineffective at making clear distinctions between levels of risk behavior content, I was curious to see if ineffective age ratings could be a cause of increased participation in risk behaviors. However, my study does not reflect this finding. Increased participation in risk behavior occurred mostly among participants who identified with a character from a tv show rated TV-MA, meaning they were watching a show not suggested for their age group, but the rating itself was proper.

In contrast to how increased *identification* with a character who participates in risk behaviors increased likely participation in risk behaviors by the participant, my results showed that *lower* levels of *PSR* with a character led to increased likely participation in risk behaviors. This makes sense because when one identifies with a character they "become" them, so if the character has fun participating in a risk behavior, they are more likely to participate in the risk behavior themselves. With PSR, on the other hand, one has a relationship with a character; they observe the character's actions from the outside and care about them, so depending on one's values, one may see what the character does as wrong and be less likely to do it themselves.

Limitations

As noted, only 52 responses were collected and 4 responses had to be disregarded. Had more participants filled out the survey, more data could have been analyzed. An additional limitation was the elimination of question #29 (Appendix D) when analyzing the results. Question #29 asked participants if they had taken any parts of their favorite character's personality as their own, but the follow up question for participants who responded yes, asking if they believed it had a positive, negative, or neutral effect on them was mistakenly left out of the survey This mistake was not realized until after. Being that 35.4% of the participants answered "yes", and another 35.4% answered "unsure" to whether or not they had taken any of their character's personality as their own (Appendix E), had the follow up question been asked, the positivity or negativity of effects in relation to the level of PSR and identification could have been slightly different.

I eliminated another aspect of my study. PSL was originally considered because of the research done by Tukachinsky (2010) that emphasized how researchers should take into account how viewers may have a parasocial friendship (PSF) or a parasocial romantic/love relationship (PSL) with a character. To address this I asked participants three questions on a Likert scale that specifically applied to PSL. I had planned on scoring a participant's overall PSR (including PSF and PSL) as well as scoring PSL separately. My intention was to see if higher levels of PSL had more positive or negative impact on participants through its correlation with the amount of positive or negative effects. However, only three questions (#22-24 Appendix C) addressed PSL specifically and the answer to question 23 was consistently not close in number to the other two questions. This was because I failed to acknowledge that someone can objectively think someone is attractive. Because of this, this layer in my study had to be disregarded.

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[15] Suggested for mature audiences (18 & older).

Another limitation of my study was response bias. I relied on self-reported data, meaning I was relying on people's ability to reflect on their own experiences and accurately report them. Participants may have never thought about the questions I asked before and their responses could have been "colored by recent events, the current context, or flowered self perceptions:"(Leedy et al., 2019, p.183). Participants may have also intentionally or unintentionally falsely answered questions to give a favorable impression, a bias known as the social desirability effect. This may have skewed the results. Evidence of the social desirability effect was seen among questions 30, 31, and 36 (Appendix D) which addressed body image. 79.2% of participants said they do *not* compare their appearance to that of their favorite character, but only 35.4% said they did not want to look like their favorite character (Appendix E). Wanting to look like their favorite character suggests a comparison in appearance. If participants had answered truthfully to each question, the correlation between PSR and identification and the positivity and negativity of effects may have been different.

Conclusion

My study addressed a gap in the field by evaluating the effects of PSR and identification together and weighing the effects to determine the extent to which they were negative. An overall extent could not be determined because there was no strict correlation between PSR and identification and the negativity of effects. Based on the results, no significant problem exists, in general, with teens forming PSR and having identification with their favorite tv characters. However, a problem does arise when teens form relationships with characters from shows rated for older audiences. In my sub-question, I addressed whether ineffective age-ratings were a possible cause of any negative effects of PSR and/or identification, and concluded that a problem did not exist in the age-rating themselves, but rather teens watching shows not rated for their age group.

As a solution, the tv industry could be more careful with the characters they present to audiences, or cable and streaming platforms, and/or parents could place more restrictions on what teens are able to watch. The most plausible solution involves making parents aware of the negative effects watching mature tv shows can have on a younger audience who forms relationships and identifies with the characters. By making parents more aware, they can be more cautious of what their teens are watching.

Further research can be done with a larger sample. This would generate more data, leading to more accurate results. Future research could also measure the extent to which the effects of PSR and identification with a tv-character are negative on teens, but among participants who formed PSR and have identification with the same character. This would eliminate the limitation of varied shows impacting teens differently because of their variation in content. The character could be from a show that is popular among teens; this would keep the question relevant since if negative or positive effects exist, they would be affecting a large population. To address PSL, future researchers could follow Tuchakinsky's (2010) suggested method more closely, making a separate Likert scale to measure PSL and PSF. However, to address my concern that since friendships are the basis of any romantic relationship a person with a high level of PSL with a character may also have a high level of PSF with them, participants can be asked to choose whether they have a friendship or romantic relationship with a character and fill out the corresponding Likert scale to measure their level of PSL or PSF.

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