

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Arts

Subject: Psychology

Course Code: PSG 104

Course Title: Psychology and Media

Unit: IV - Interaction with Media

Module Name: The Viewer as a Psychologist: Identification and Parasocial Interaction

Module No: 21

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Notes

THE VIEWER AS A PSYCHOLOGIST: IDENTIFICATION AND PARASOCIAL INTERACTION

Is identification with T.V characters truly necessary for the enjoyment of soap? Might other cognitive processes be equally important? Associationism is a more appropriate term than identification. Most viewers appreciation is based around the quality of the acting - the convincing portrayal of emotions the depth of character. Para-social interaction with their favourite characters is strongest when they were most able to predict the feelings and attitudes of those characters. They explained this in terms of uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), a cognitive process found to be important for forming ordinary social relationships. Reduced uncertainty about a person makes it easier to anticipate his or her responses to social situations, and this results in "attributional confidence" - the feeling that we know person completely. The length of time a participant spends viewing a character, may explain why many soap fans become strongly attached to long-standing soap characters.

Viewers have biographical knowledge about the characters concerning their relationship history, including previous activities that may be unknown to others. Viewers may have access to some of the characters' most private moments. Soap's appeal may lie in the fact that this information is very rarely

accessible in real life. Anyone who has ever stolen a glance through a friend's private diary will know that the disclosure of private sentiments is very often unpalatable/indigestible to us. Soap's enjoyment results in part from the lack of responsibility that viewers have for the characters. It allows us to indulge our social curiosity without ever experiencing the repercussions. It also allows us to discuss the characters and their activities with fellow soap viewers, which is an essential aspect of soap appeal. Soap facilitates safe gossip - no harm can be done in casting criticisms about the intentions or morals of a soap character. Gillespie (1995) found a similar function of soap in her Punjabi sample, where soap was used as a way of solving family problems in a culture in which izzat, a code of honour, prohibits discussion of such issues outside the family.

Ultimately, the success of soap lies in its ability to permeate everyday conversation between viewers. This is the context in which para-social relationships are formed and in which fictional creations come to life. "After a while, the characters do become real people and we are concerned for their well-being just as we are for our friends and colleagues.

References

1. Giles, D. (2003). *Media psychology*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.