

Investigating Personality and Viewing-Motivation Correlates of Reality Television Exposure

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This study investigated the personality and viewing-motivation correlates of reality television exposure. Results from a survey of 592 undergraduates showed that extroversion negatively predicted reality television exposure, whereas neuroticism was not associated with it. Both instrumental (social interaction, information, and arousal) and ritualized (relaxation, pass time, entertainment, and companionship) viewing motivations positively predicted exposure to reality television. A two-stage model by which personality traits contributed to viewing motivations, which, in turn, contributed to the selection of reality television, was tested and offered an adequate fit to the data. Implications for uses and gratifications research are discussed.

Keywords: Audience Appeal; Personality; Reality Television; Uses and Gratifications

Since the debut of *Survivor* in 2000, reality television has become a relatively permanent fixture on primetime programming schedules. Indeed, there are two major factors that underlie the success of reality television. First, it has the ability to not only draw large audiences that compete with the audience size of popular

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fictional programming, but also compete for more focused audience niches. For example, during the 2006 through 2007 season, the first and second most popular shows were *American Idol* and *Dancing With the Stars*, easily beating out the third and fourth shows on that list—*CSI* and *Grey's Anatomy* (Nielsen Media Research, 2007). Still, other reality programs on cable networks, such as *Project Runway*, attract a smaller (and younger and wealthier) demographic (Greppi, 2006). Second, the relatively inexpensive production costs of reality shows make them a bargain for both broadcast and cable networks (Carter, 2008; Lowry, 2004), making it likely that the genre will continue to be a fixture on the television landscape.

Given the popularity of the reality genre, a good deal of critical/cultural scholarship has already examined the issue of why audiences are drawn to reality programming (Andrejevic, 2004; Bignell, 2005; Hill, 2005). In addition, reality television is of interest to media effects researchers, who seek to understand if and how it shapes viewers' thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes about the world around them (e.g., Cavendar & Bond-Maupin, 1993; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995). Studying the personality antecedents and motivations for viewing reality television will allow researchers to better understand who is likely to be drawn to reality television and with what potential impact (Rubin, 2002).

One of the challenges of studying reality programming is identifying the attributes that define it. This is becoming increasingly difficult as reality programs have become more numerous and diverse. In this context, we find Hall's (2006) definition of reality television, which was based on focus-group interviews with college-aged participants, to best encompass the characteristics of reality programs: "shows that portray people whose behavior is not predetermined by a script and has the potential to reveal their true natures" (p. 208).

In this study, we examine personality traits and audience motives that might guide individuals' selection or avoidance of reality television. We also test a two-stage model by which personality characteristics predict audience motives, which further predict reality television selection. Whereas previous research has examined the zero-order correlates of reality television (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004), this article investigates the mediating role of audience motivations in understanding the relations between personality traits and reality television selection.

Uses and Gratifications of Media Exposure

The uses and gratifications (U&G) tradition examines how and why audiences are motivated to consume media. The main précis of this framework is to understand the social and psychological origins of audience needs, which generate expectations of the mass media (McQuail, 1984). These differing expectations, in turn, lead to differential patterns of media exposure, resulting in gratifications that determine whether exposure will cease or continue (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Within this tradition, this study focused on two origins of reality television exposure: personality characteristics and viewing motivations.

Personality Antecedents to the Selection of Reality Television

Current research stresses that viewers' predispositions guide, filter, or mediate media usage patterns (Finn, 1997; Hall, 2005; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004; Rubin, 2002). To explain how personality characteristics are related to television viewing patterns, Reiss and Wiltz introduced sensitivity theory, which they described as a variant of the U&G framework. According to this perspective, people pay attention to television content that satisfies their most basic motives because it provides a convenient, minimal-effort means of vicariously satisfying these needs. For example, people with the basic desire for vengeance will be attracted to violent television programs because doing so arouses feelings of vindication, which are felt as joyful to these individuals. Indeed, the results of a number of studies support the hypothesis that personality traits are linked to audiences' use of various types of television including news (Perse, 1992), violent television content (Krcmar & Kean, 2005), religious programs (Hoover, 1988), and reality-based crime shows (Oliver & Armstrong, 1995).

In two separate articles, Nabi and colleagues examined personality correlates of reality television exposure. In the first article, Nabi et al. (2003) examined relations between reality television viewing and voyeurism, impulsivity, and need for cognition and found that these three traits were not correlated with reality television exposure. In the second study, Nabi, Stitt, Halford, and Finnerty (2006) examined the influences of need for cognition and emotional intelligence and again found no relation to the enjoyment of reality television. Still, they found that voyeurism did predict enjoyment of reality programs, but it did not predict enjoyment of fictional programs.

In contrast to Nabi et al.'s (2003; Nabi et al., 2006) approach of choosing personality traits that might be conceptually related to reality television, ours was to examine global personality traits that are meant to represent fundamental elements of human personality. For this endeavor, we chose the Big Three model of personality (Eysenck, 1985), which includes (a) extroversion—one's degree of sociability, (b) neuroticism—a tendency toward anxiousness and loneliness, and (c) psychoticism—a cluster of traits including egocentricity, a lack of concern about social norms, and impulsivity. Eysenck argued that these three factors exhaustively cover the major aspects of personality. Unfortunately, psychoticism could not be investigated in this analysis because the factor did not hold up to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), nor was it internally consistent. Thus, we focus on the other two factors of personality: extroversion and neuroticism.

Neuroticism and reality television exposure

A typical description of a neurotic individual is that of an anxious, worrying, and moody person, who is inclined to avoid conflict (Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Bragason, Einarsson, & Valdimarsdottir, 2004). Based on this profile, researchers have hypothesized that neurotics will be motivated to use mass media as a form of escape (Katz & Foulkes, 1962), as a countervailing source of positive affect (Anderson, Collins, Schmitt, & Jacobvitz, 1996), and as a relief from nervousness and anxiety (Hall, 2005).

Although previous research has found essentially no relation between neuroticism and general media use variables (Finn, 1997; Hall, 2005), this is not to say that neuroticism would not be associated with reality television viewing due to its unique ability to provide escapism for audiences (e.g., Hall, 2006). Indeed, audiences find reality television rather enjoyable, presumably because it satisfies their need for voyeurism (Nabi et al., 2006) and because it is unpredictable in the sense that nobody knows what will happen next (Sayre & King, 2003). Thus, if reality television is perceived by viewers as relaxing or an escape from daily life, those who are high on neuroticism might choose to view it. Also, because loneliness is a characteristic of neuroticism, neurotics might be attracted to reality television because it serves as a preferred substitute for direct relations with others (Shim & Paul, 2007). Thus, we pose the following research question:

RQ1: Will neuroticism be associated with exposure to reality television?

Extroversion and reality television exposure

A typical extrovert is sociable, active, dominant, warm toward others, and assertive; he or she has needs for social interaction with others (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Gudjonsson et al., 2004). Finn (1997) reasoned that extroverts would seek activities that provide direct social contact and would avoid television viewing because they would rather be *doing* the activities they see on television, rather than vicariously *observing* them. In support of this assumption, research has found that extroverts avoid television (Finn, 1997; Krcmar & Kean, 2005). Based on the findings of these studies, it is possible that extroverts will avoid reality television because they would balk at simply observing “real” people’s lives and would seek, instead, to experience those activities for themselves.

However, other researchers have found a positive relationship between extroversion and media use—in particular, media use that has the potential of providing social interaction, such as going to the movies (Weaver, 1991) or listening to music (Hall, 2005). Both of these media activities are often done in the company of others. Thus, to the extent that watching reality television is a social activity, we might expect extroverts to be attracted to it. In fact, a recent study by Shim and Paul (2007) showed that extroversion was positively correlated with attention to reality television viewing. Their explanation was that reality shows have a realistic feel and look, as well as unpredictability, and both of these characteristics provide extroverts “with a stronger sense of ‘being’ in the real world” (Shim & Paul, 2007, p. 300). In addition, Reiss and Wiltz (2004) found heavy reality television viewers reported watching the genre in order to have something to talk about with others. Thus, given the uncertainty in the direction, we posited the following research question:

RQ2: Will extroversion be associated with exposure to reality television?

Given the diverse themes and characters portrayed, it is possible that personality characteristics will relate differently to sub-genres of reality television, including romantic, competition, surveillance (i.e., shows that follow people’s “real” lives),

and makeover reality shows, to name some sub-categories that have been investigated in previous research (Everett, 2004; Hall, 2006; Nabi, 2007; Nabi et al., 2003; Nabi et al., 2006). Thus, we pose the following question:

RQ3: How will personality relate to the selection of reality television sub-categories?

Understanding Audiences' Motivations to View Reality Television

A main tenet of the U&G framework is that people select and use media to satisfy their needs or desires. These viewing motivations have been found to be differentially related to television viewing and content selection (for a review, see Rubin, 2002). For example, research has shown that using television to gain useful information is associated with watching talk-interview formats, news, and game show programming, whereas using television to pass the time or to be entertained is associated with fictional program viewing (Rubin, 1983).

From a critical/cultural perspective, Andrejevic (2004) argued that reality television appeals to audiences' voyeurism fetish, which is really the performance of a desire for power. Being a voyeur enables audiences to exert control by occupying the "position of the master" (p. 174) over the reality television subject. In addition, reality television provides access to the "real," unscripted, authentic nature of the reality television characters. Similarly, Bignell (2005) also claimed that reality television appeals to viewers' sense of voyeurism, but his argument rested on the assumption that this voyeurism allows audiences to stigmatize and differentiate between themselves and reality characters.

From a U&G perspective, viewing motivations are often classified into two major categories of use: television for time consumption and entertainment (i.e., ritualized viewing), and television for information-seeking purposes (i.e., instrumental viewing; Rubin, 1984, 2002). Ritualized viewers are likely to use television out of habit and for diversion; viewing motivations classified as ritualized include the motivation to be entertained, to relax, to have companionship, to pass the time, and to escape (Rubin, 1984). In contrast, instrumental viewing is purposive, and includes the motivations to learn about events, to be aroused, and to facilitate social interaction with others.

Nabi et al.'s (2003) study found that regular viewers of reality television watched it because of its entertainment value, but did *not* watch reality television to gain useful information. Similarly, Barton (2006) found that people who were attracted to reality programming were motivated to pass the time. Thus, it was reasonable to expect the following:

H1: Ritualized viewing motivations (i.e., entertainment, pass the time, relaxation, and companionship) will be positively associated with exposure to reality television.

Our prediction for the instrumental viewing motivation was not as straightforward. Based on the Nabi et al. (2003) findings, we might expect instrumental viewing to be negatively related to reality television viewing. However, Hill's (2005) findings from focus groups of reality television viewers complicated this picture somewhat. Although reality television can teach audiences about their own behavior by watching

how other people behave, adult reality television viewers in Hill's study were hesitant to acknowledge that they indeed learn from reality television because such a claim implies a lack of knowledge about social behavior—that is, although reality television viewers realize it is not desirable to admit that reality television lets them learn about the way people live, they might learn nevertheless. Furthermore, Hill's data revealed that younger viewers were more open to learning about life as a by-product of watching entertaining reality programming. Thus, we pose a research question to address this motivation:

RQ4: Will instrumental viewing motivations (i.e., information, social interaction, and arousal) be associated with exposure to reality television?

Viewing Motivations Intervening Between Personality and Reality Television Selection

Contemporary U&G models emphasize that media selection is a multistage process. First, personality factors appear to generate certain audience needs (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). An example of this link is evident in a study by Weaver (2000), who found that extroversion was associated with watching television for social interaction. Second, these needs contribute to gratifications sought, influencing media selection and use (Haridakis, 2002; Krcmar & Kean, 2005). For example, Reiss and Wiltz showed that viewers who have the need to feel self-important are regular viewers of reality television. Marrying these two lines of research, we propose a two-stage model in which we first investigate the relations between personality traits and viewing motivations, and then the relations between viewing motivations and reality television exposure.

This conceptualization has support from scholars who have investigated links between personality traits and media selection. For example, Finn (1997) argued that between the psychological origins that characterize the input variables in his analysis and media use that served as the outcome variables, there are two other contingent conditions—needs and expectations—that must be implicitly bridged to establish the hypothesized connections. Similarly, in characterizing the findings of her study, Hall (2005) concluded that the “pattern of findings of this study suggests that the roles that audience members’ personalities play in shaping media use patterns may be played out in the context of specific gratifications that media texts are perceived to offer” (p. 396). Shim and Paul (2007) also commented on the rather small effect size of the personality variables on genre selection; they argued that examining intervening variables in this process might increase the amount of variance that researchers can explain in television selection.

In testing the meditational hypotheses, we saw the viewing motivations operating differently based on personality. Because extroversion is associated with a need for social contact (Finn, 1997), we speculated the instrumental viewing motivations would be predicted by extroversion. In contrast, given that neuroticism is associated with a need for escapism and relaxation (Katz & Foulkes, 1962), we thought those needs were most closely aligned with the ritualized television viewing motivations. Thus, we thought it was plausible that ritualized viewing motivations might be a

particularly viable mediator for neuroticism, whereas instrumental viewing motivation would be a mediator for extroversion.

However, we also tested the analogous personality-motivation combinations to more fully understand the portrait of personality and motivations. Thus, we present an additional research question for each viewing motivation to explore the relationships with the corresponding personality-motivation combination:

H2: Instrumental viewing motivations will mediate relations between extroversion and reality television selection.

RQ5: Will instrumental viewing motivations mediate the relationship between neuroticism and reality television selection?

H3: Ritualized viewing motivations will mediate the relations between neuroticism and reality television selection.

RQ6: Will ritualized viewing motivations mediate the relationship between extroversion and reality television selection?

Method

Participants

In total, 592 undergraduates from a large, Midwestern university completed our questionnaire in exchange for extra credit in a Communication or a Human Development and Family Studies class. Participants were, on average, 19.83 years old ($SD = 2.37$), ranging from 17 to 43. Although a convenience sample is never ideal, we argue this was an acceptable sample because not only do many reality television programs target this age group, but also it is the viewers under 25 “who have so ardently embraced the genre” (Frank, 2003, p. 3).

In the sample, 67.6% ($n = 398$) were women, and 32.4% ($n = 191$) were men. In total, 86.3% ($n = 511$) identified as Caucasian, 7.4% ($n = 44$) as African American, 2.5% ($n = 15$) as Asian American, and 0.5% ($n = 4$) as Latino. The remaining 2.8% ($n = 17$) did not identify with any of these categories. From 1 (*less than high school*) to 6 (*graduate degree completed*), participants reported a mean of 4.33 ($SD = 1.50$) to describe their mothers' education and 4.64 ($SD = 1.54$) to describe their fathers'.

Procedure

We recruited students from their classes and had them report to a computer lab at a specific time. There, participants completed online surveys in a session facilitated by a research assistant.

Measures

Television exposure variables

Exposure to reality television. Thirty-two reality shows were nested in an alphabetical list of 100 television programs, which also included dramas (e.g., *The West Wing*),

sitcoms (e.g., *Scrubs*), soap operas (e.g., *One Life to Live*), and talk shows (e.g., *The Oprah Show*). Respondents reported on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*whenever it's on*) how often they viewed each of the 32 reality programs.¹ Their scores were averaged ($\alpha = .85$).

Exposure to reality television sub-categories. Although Nabi et al. (2003) concluded that reality television does form a cohesive genre, it is important to acknowledge that there is no uniform typology of reality programs (Nabi, 2007). Defining reality sub-categories is challenging because reality programs are constantly in flux. Also, many shows could belong in more than one category; *The Bachelor*, for example, could be categorized as romantic, as well as competition. Nevertheless, researchers tend to group programs based on personal impressions of similarity (e.g., Barton, 2006; Everett, 2004), which can be difficult for future research to replicate (Nabi, 2007). Instead, we ran an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on participants' frequency-of-viewing scores to determine if the reality programs could be reduced to clusters of programs that people prefer. In doing this, we dropped the eight programs that less than 10% of the sample reported watching² so that the resulting factors were comprised of the 24 reality shows that participants were watching with some regularity.

The remaining shows were then subjected to a principal components EFA with varimax rotation.³ Initial results yielded six factors with eigenvalues over 1.0, but an examination of the scree plot revealed that the amount of variance explained by each factor dropped off dramatically after four factors. The criterion level for factor loadings was set at .50 without loading on any other factor at .30 or higher. Four factors resulted, explaining 49.1% of the variance: (a) surveillance (*The Real World*, *The Simple Life*, *Laguna Beach*, *The Surreal Life*, and *Punk'd*; 25.6% variance explained; $\alpha = .74$), which, in general, provides a documentary-style perspective on people's lives; (b) makeover/lifestyle (*Nanny 911*, *Super Nanny*, *Extreme Home Makeover*, *Extreme Makeover*, and *The Swan*; 8.8% variance explained; $\alpha = .74$) in which people undergo major transformations of their homes (e.g., *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*), their parenting or marriages (*Super Nanny* and *Nanny 911*), or their physical appearances (*Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*); (c) romantic (*The Bachelorette*, *The Bachelor*, *Dancing With the Stars*, and *Beauty and the Geek*; 7.7% variance explained; $\alpha = .76$), which appear to be unified by the theme of the pursuit of romantic affections, or at least contrived romantic situations (*Dancing With the Stars*); and (d) competition (*Survivor*, *The Amazing Race*, and *Big Brother*; 7.0% variance explained; $\alpha = .67$) in which contestants competed for a monetary prize.⁴

Clearly, the resulting categories were not pristine. For example, the romantic category included shows that were meant to match contestants with potential mates (*The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*); *Dancing With the Stars* is only vaguely romantic in that celebrities are matched with professional dancing partners. The lack of clear categories is similar to Nabi's (2007) study, which showed that, although dating reality shows were identified by respondents as a unique sub-genre, the other categories were intertwined so that a clear typology remains elusive.

Personality characteristics

The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire–Revised (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975; for an abbreviated form of the questionnaire, see Francis, Brown, & Philipchalk, 1992) was used. Six items assessed each of three factors. Participants responded “yes” or “no” to questions such as, “Are you a lively person?” (extroversion), “Are you a worrier?” (neuroticism), and “Do you prefer to go your own way rather than follow the rules?” (psychoticism). “Yes” responses were coded as 1, and “no” responses were coded as 0. The 18 items were subjected to a CFA. The model with all three factors did not demonstrate an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2/df=3.55$, comparative fit index [CFI] = .78, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .086), and all loadings on the psychoticism factor were nonsignificant. The fit of the model was significantly improved when the psychoticism factor was omitted, $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(79) = 171.50$, $p < .001$ ($\chi^2/df=3.55$, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .078). Thus, we dropped psychoticism from subsequent analyses. The extroversion and neuroticism items were summed (extroversion, $\alpha = .76$; neuroticism, $\alpha = .70$).

Viewing motivations

Participants completed the Television Viewing Motives Scale (Rubin, 1983). On a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), participants indicated their agreement with 27 reasons for watching television. Three statements represented each of nine factors: relaxation (“because it relaxes me”), companionship (“so I don’t have to be alone”), habit (“because it is there”), pass time (“when I have nothing better to do”), entertainment (“because it entertains me”), social interaction (“because it is something to do with friends”), information (“so I can learn how to do things which I have not done before”), arousal (“because it is stimulating”), and escape (“so I can forget about school, work, or other things”).

To confirm the factor structure of the scale, we conducted a CFA. The fit of the model with all nine factors was in need of improvement ($\chi^2/df=4.12$, CFI = .87, RMSEA = .083). In investigating the internal consistency of the subscales, we noticed that the alphas for habit ($\alpha = .58$) and escape ($\alpha = .62$) were the lowest. We omitted habit to see if the fit of the model was significantly improved, and it was: $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(64) = 428.90$, $p < .001$; but again, the fit indexes were not ideal ($\chi^2/df=3.39$, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .074). We then omitted escape, which again significantly improved the fit: $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(56) = 221.00$, $p < .001$; and it demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2/df=3.20$, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .061). Because omitting other subscales did not significantly improve the fit of the model, we settled on using seven subscales of viewing motivations: social interaction ($\alpha = .66$), arousal ($\alpha = .69$), relaxation ($\alpha = .72$), information ($\alpha = .77$), companionship ($\alpha = .78$), pass time ($\alpha = .79$), and entertainment ($\alpha = .85$).

At this point, it is important to refer to *H1* and *H2*, which made predictions about the relations between ritualized and instrumental viewing motivations. Given that the goal was to examine the links with these more latent constructs and to increase parsimony in our data analyses, we conducted an additional second-order

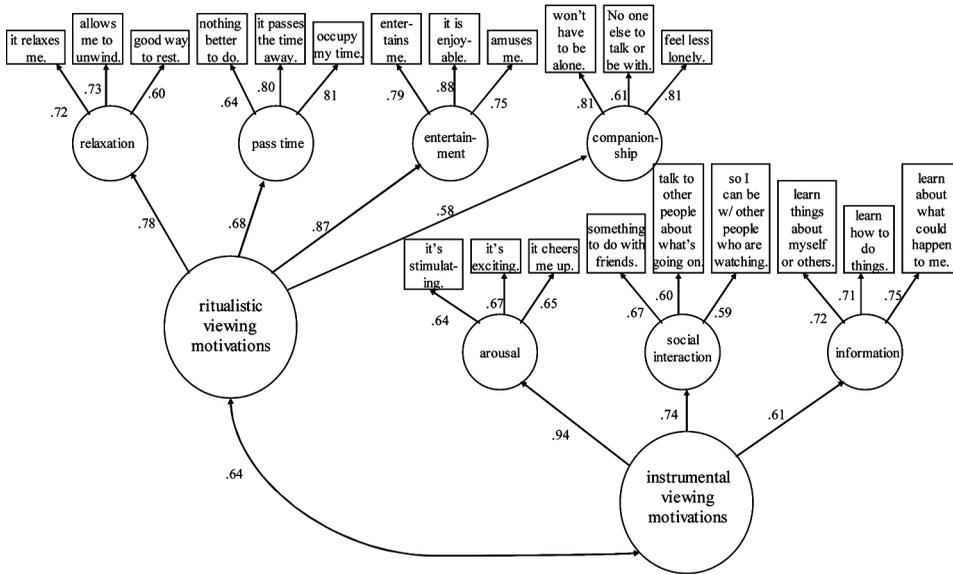


Figure 1 Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Television Viewing Motivations. *Note.* Standardized Path Coefficients Are Reported. All Paths are Significant at $p < .00$.

CFA, examining whether the first-order factors (TV viewing motivations) load onto a second order of latent constructs (ritualized and instrumental viewing motivations). The second-order CFA model is presented in Figure 1. The model demonstrated an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 3.78$, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .071). Thus, based on these results, we constructed two viewing motivations scales: one for ritualized viewing motivations, comprised of the items from the relaxation, pass time, entertainment, and companionship subscales (12 items total; $\alpha = .84$); and one for instrumental viewing motivations, comprised of the items from the arousal, social interaction, and information subscales (9 items total; $\alpha = .81$).

Data Analysis

To examine RQ1 through RQ4, as well as H1, we ran hierarchical regression models (HRMs) in which we controlled for “social origins” of media use (Finn, 1997), including age, sex, parents’ education, and income. We also controlled for total hours of television watched so that we could be sure that the predictor variables were related to reality television *per se*, and not to television viewing in general. All of these control variables were entered in Block 1 of the model, the personality variables in Block 2, and the viewing motivations in Block 3. The criterion variables included both total reality television exposure, as well as the four reality sub-categories: romantic, competition, surveillance, and makeover/lifestyle.⁵

To test our meditational hypotheses and research questions, we ran additional path models, with both personality variables entered as the predictor variables, either instrumental or ritualized viewing motivations (to avoid the issue of multiple

mediating paths) entered as the mediating variables, and reality television exposure entered as the criterion variable. For these models, we were primarily interested in the mediation effects, so we did not replicate the latent variables seen in Figure 1, but instead used the collapsed scales.

A popular assessment of mediation is the causal-step method (Baron & Kenny, 1986), which involves four steps:

1. The initial variable must exhibit a significant influence on the outcome variable.
2. The initial variable must be significantly related to the potential mediator.
3. The mediator must have a significant relationship with the outcome variable.
4. If the relationship between the initial and outcome variable is reduced to non-significance, then complete mediation is occurring.

Note that the approach of Step 4 only establishes the conditions for mediation, rather than a statistical computation of the amount of mediation (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007); and second, this approach is useful when testing regression-based analysis of a single mediator and a single outcome variable. Thus, we follow the advice of Holbert and Stephenson (2003), who argued for the indirect effect as the “most important type of effect for assessing mediation in structural equation modeling” (p. 562). In this context, the indirect effect represents the portion of one variable on another as that variable’s influence works through an intervening variable.

In addition, it is important to note that most analysts agree that Step 1 of the causal-step method is not required, particularly in cases where suppression, which occurs when the relation between the initial variable and outcome variable are opposite in sign to the indirect effect of the component paths, might be occurring (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). In these cases, it is oftentimes the case that the initial variable has no effect on the outcome variable because the mediator acts as a suppressor variable. Thus, most analysts believe that the essential steps in establishing mediation are Steps 2 and 3.

Thus, our data analysis strategy is twofold. First, we examine whether the component paths of the mediational models (independent variable-mediator and mediator-dependent variable) are statistically significant, thus satisfying Step 2 and Step 3 of the causal-step method. When these paths are significant, we test for the significance of the indirect effect in the model. We tested the indirect effects via the distribution of products test (MacKinnon et al., 2002), which converts each parameter estimate into a *z* score (by dividing each unstandardized parameter estimate by its respective standard error), and then obtaining the product of the two *z* scores.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Respondents reported a mean of 1.93 ($SD = 0.52$) on a 6-point scale of exposure to reality programs, which ranged from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*whenever it’s on*). However, even the most dedicated reality television viewer would not faithfully watch the 24

programs that comprised this index. However, 36.9% ($n=220$) of the sample reported watching at least one of the reality programs “whenever it’s on.” Of the sub-categories, respondents reported watching surveillance reality shows the most ($M=2.05$, $SD=0.92$), followed by romantic shows ($M=1.97$, $SD=0.98$), makeover/lifestyle shows ($M=1.73$, $SD=0.82$), and competition shows ($M=0.47$, $SD=0.70$).

On a scale from 0 (answered “no” to all six personality questions) to 6 (answered “yes” to all personality questions), the mean score for extroversion was 1.45 ($SD=1.56$) and was 3.17 ($SD=1.84$) for neuroticism. The extroversion and neuroticism subscales were negatively correlated ($r=-.13$, $p<.01$). On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), participants were more likely to be motivated to watch television for ritualistic reasons ($M=3.86$, $SD=0.57$) than for instrumental reasons ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.67$). Table 1 shows the zero-order correlations between the main variables of analysis.

Findings for Personality Characteristics Predicting Reality Television Exposure

RQ1: Will neuroticism be associated with exposure to reality television?

The results showed that neuroticism had essentially no impact on reality television exposure; and, not surprisingly, the block of personality variables did not significantly improve the R^2 of the model ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p > .05$). The results are reported in Table 2.

RQ2: Will extroversion be associated with reality television selection?

As also reported in Table 2, extroversion, as an individual predictor, significantly predicted total reality television viewing. In answer to RQ2, extroversion was a negative predictor of reality television exposure; however, it should be noted that the strength of the relation was very modest ($\beta = -.11$), which is smaller than all of the statistically significant demographic predictors.

RQ3: How will personality relate to the selection of reality television sub-categories?

In terms of personality connections to reality television sub-genres, the results are in line with the findings for RQ1. As can be seen in Table 2, neuroticism did not predict the selection of any of the reality television sub-genres, and extroversion negatively predicted the surveillance sub-category of reality television. Extroversion was not, however, related to the selection of the other reality television sub-genres, including romantic, makeover/lifestyle, or competition.

H1: Ritualized viewing motivations will be positively associated with exposure to reality television

The results in Table 2 supported H1 for reality television in general, as well as to surveillance and romantic reality sub-genres in particular. The size of these relations were again small (betas ranged from .11–.13), and ritualized viewing motivations

Table 1 Zero-Order Correlations Between Control and Predictor Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	1.00													
2. Sex (female)	-0.04	1.00												
3. Parent education	0.01	0.06	1.00											
4. Household income	-0.15***	-0.01	0.32***	1.00										
5. TV hours per week	0.08 [†]	-0.29***	-0.07	-0.05	1.00									
6. Extroversion	0.01	-0.13**	-0.04	-0.13**	-0.01	1.00								
7. Neuroticism	0.03	-0.09*	0.04	-0.01	-0.05	-0.13**	1.00							
8. Ritualized motives	0.01	0.01	0.02	-0.02	0.36***	-0.05	-0.06	1.00						
9. Instrumental motives	0.07	-0.08	-0.04	-0.05	0.27***	-0.11*	-0.10*	0.50***	1.00					
10. Total reality	-0.01	0.24***	0.02	0.12**	0.24***	-0.17***	-0.02	0.27***	0.27***	1.00				
11. Surveillance	-0.07	0.19***	0.04	0.14**	0.27***	-0.19***	-0.06	0.29***	0.26**	0.72***	1.00			
12. Romantic	0.00	0.34***	0.01	0.09*	0.06	-0.10*	0.00	0.20***	0.13**	0.70***	0.36***	1.00		
13. Makeover	-0.02	0.34***	0.02	0.07	0.11**	-0.11**	0.01	0.17***	0.15***	0.72***	0.36***	0.48***	1.00	
14. Competition	0.06	-0.03	0.01	0.00	0.11**	-0.02	0.00	0.05	0.12**	0.48***	0.14**	0.26***	0.24***	1.00

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. [†] $p < .10$.

Table 2 Summary of HRMs Examining the Contribution of Social Origin Variables, Extroversion, and Viewing Motivations on Total Reality Television Exposure and Reality Sub-Categories

Variable	Total reality	Surveillance	Romantic	Makeover	Competition
Block 1					
Age	.02	-.05	.04	.01	.06
Sex (female)	.37***	.29***	.38***	.42***	-.02
Household income	.15***	.16***	.14**	.09	.00
Parent education	-.03	-.01	-.04	-.02	.03
TV hours per week	.35***	.36***	.15***	.24***	.07
Adjusted R^2	.19***	.16***	.14***	.17***	.01
Block 2					
Extroversion	-.11**	-.14***	-.05	-.07	-.03
Neuroticism	.04	-.02	.04	.04	.01
Adjusted ΔR^2	.02	.02	.01	.01	.00
Block 3					
Ritualized motives	.11*	.11*	.13*	.05	-.01
Instrumental motives	.15***	.14**	.07	.09*	.12*
Adjusted ΔR^2	.04*	.03*	.03*	.02	.01

Note. For all models, $N = 561$. Sex was coded as 1 = male, 2 = female. Coefficients are standardized betas. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

did not significantly predict exposure to makeover/lifestyle or competition reality. Thus, $H1$ was supported for three of the five reality television selection variables.

RQ4: Will instrumental viewing motivations be associated with exposure to reality television?

In answer to $RQ4$, instrumental viewing motivations *positively* predicted the selection of four out of the five reality television selection variables; and again, the relations were modest (betas ranged from .09–.15). The only variable not predicted by instrumental viewing motives was the selection of romantic reality television.

Mediational Models Examining Personality on Reality Television Exposure via Viewing Motivations

H2 & RQ5: Instrumental viewing motivations mediating relations between personality and reality television selection

The first model, examining $H2$ and $RQ5$, instrumental viewing motivations as the mediating variable, is presented in Figure 2. The model showed an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 4.12$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07). An investigation of the component paths of the model reveal that extroversion positively predicted instrumental viewing

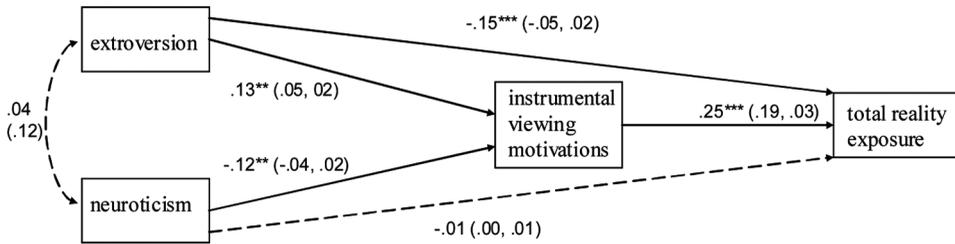


Figure 2 Instrumental viewing motivations as a mediator in the relation between personality variables and reality television exposure. *Note.* Standardized path coefficients are reported first, and the unstandardized coefficients and associated standard errors are reported in parentheses. $\chi^2(1, N=561) = 4.08, p = .05$. Dotted paths are $p > .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

motivations, which, in turn, positively predicted total reality television exposure. Thus, the indirect effect of extroversion on reality television selection is statistically significant and positive in direction.⁶ However, it is important to note that a negative direct effect between extroversion and total reality exposure remains. Furthermore, the indirect effect is smaller (standardized indirect effect = .03) than the direct effect (standardized path coefficient = $-.15$); thus, there is evidence that suppression is occurring in this model. Thus, although there is some evidence of mediation occurring, which is in line with *H2*, the evidence is in favor of a direct relation between extroversion and reality television selection, which is more convincing. We further consider these findings in the Discussion section.

To investigate *RQ5*, we also see from Figure 2 that neuroticism negatively predicted instrumental viewing motivations. The instrumental viewing motivations, in turn, positively predicted total reality exposure. The indirect effect here is negative in direction and statistically significant⁷, although the direct effect of neuroticism on reality television exposure is not statistically significant. Overall, the results suggest that instrumental viewing motivations mediate the relation between neuroticism and reality television exposure.

We did not include the reality sub-genre variables in the model in Figure 2 because they shared measurement terms with the total reality television variable. Thus, to further investigate both *H1* and *RQ5*, we ran an additional path model examining instrumental viewing motivations as a mediator between the personality variables and the four reality sub-genre variables—surveillance, romantic, makeover, and competition—this time entering the reality sub-genre variables as the criterion variables (see Figure 3). The model's fit was adequate ($\chi^2/df = 4.10$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .07). From the model, we can see that the mediational pattern that was established with Figure 2, in relation to *H2*, was repeated with the reality sub-genres. Extroversion positively predicted instrumental viewing motivations, which, in turn, positively predicted all four of the reality television sub-genres. However, for two of the reality sub-genres—surveillance and makeover reality programming—the direct effects were significant and negative. Thus, again, it appears that instrumental viewing motivations suppress the direct relationship between extroversion and the selection of these

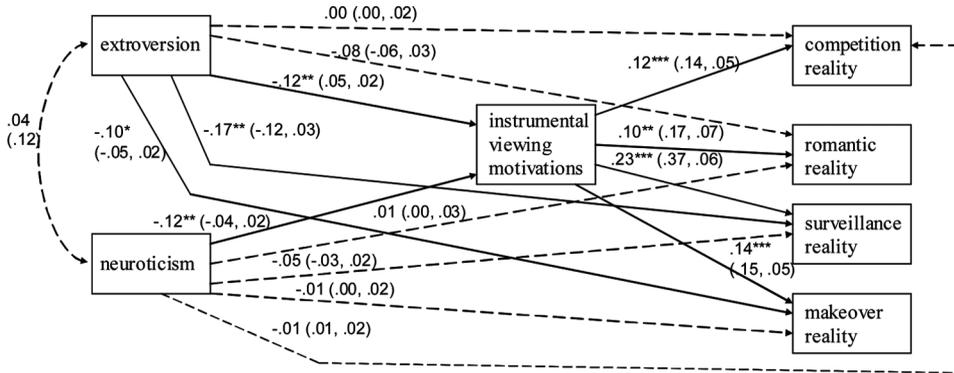


Figure 3 Instrumental viewing motivations as a mediator in the relation between personality variables and reality genres. *Note.* Standardized path coefficients are reported first, and the unstandardized coefficients and associated standard errors are reported in parentheses. $\chi^2(1, N=555) = 4.10, p = .04$. The error terms of the outcome variables were allowed to correlate; however, for presentation purposes, the paths are omitted here. Dotted paths are $p > .05$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

reality sub-genres. However, in the other two cases, the direct effect between extroversion and both competition and romantic reality television viewing were not statistically significant in the first place, suggesting that extroverts will only select those sub-genres if they are motivated to watch television for instrumental reasons. Nevertheless, all of these indirect effects were statistically significant⁸, thus suggesting that mediation is occurring.

In the same model, the pattern of results for neuroticism as the predictor was also repeated. Here, neuroticism negatively predicted instrumental viewing motivations, which, in turn, positively predicted exposure to the four reality sub-genre reality variables; and these indirect effects were statistically significant.⁹ Again, because the direct effects between neuroticism and exposure to reality sub-genres were not statistically significant, neurotics do not appear to select the reality sub-genres in general, but only if the instrumental viewing motivation intervenes in the relationship.

H3 & RQ6: Ritualistic viewing motivations will mediate the relations between personality and reality television selection

To test *H3*, we examined ritualistic viewing motivations as a mediator between neuroticism and total reality television exposure. The model is shown in Figure 4. Although the model's fit diagnostics were adequate ($\chi^2/df = 4.12, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .04$), the model disconfirms *H3*. The findings suggest that ritualized viewing motivations were not predicted by neuroticism; thus, the criteria for mediation could not be met. Similarly, in investigation of *RQ6*, extroversion was also not related to ritualistic viewing motivations. Thus, in both cases, the results suggest that ritualized viewing motivations do not mediate the relations between personality and reality television selection.¹⁰

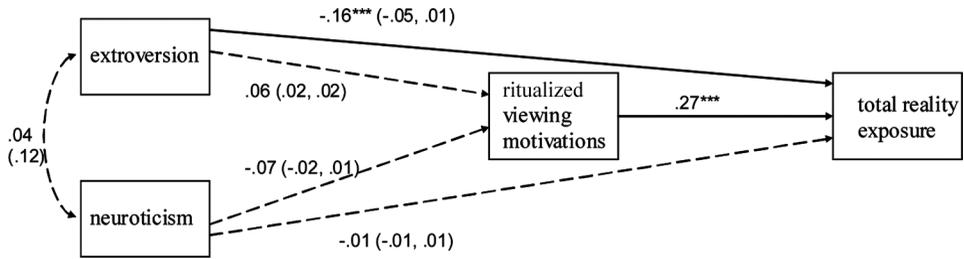


Figure 4 Instrumental viewing motivations as a mediator in the relation between personality variables and reality television exposure. *Note.* Standardized path coefficients are reported first, and the unstandardized coefficients and associated standard errors are reported in parentheses. $\chi^2(1, N = 561) = 4.08, p = .05$. Dotted paths are $p > .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to extend research on the personality and motivational correlates of reality television exposure. Before discussing the implications of this study, we must first acknowledge that due to its correlational nature, we cannot conclude that there are causal relations between these variables. The U&G framework would suggest that both personality and viewing motivations precede the selection of reality television exposure. Still, the possibility that reality television is better understood as shaping individuals' personality or cultivating differing viewing motivations is not ruled out by this research. Indeed, Bilandzic and Rössler (2004) argued that the relations between viewing motivations and the selection of television genres are likely to be reinforcing and reciprocal.

Our first objective was to investigate which types of personality traits are associated with reality television. The results showed that extroversion negatively predicted watching reality television, in general, and the surveillance sub-category, in particular. A likely reason for this avoidance is that extroverts would rather be out *doing* than in front of a television *watching*. Previous research supports these findings for general television exposure (e.g., Finn, 1997; Hall, 2005). However, this finding contradicts the recent findings of Shim and Paul (2007), which showed that high extroverts were more likely to pay attention to reality programs than low extroverts. The difference in findings could relate to differences in measurements. Shim and Paul used a single-item global measure of attention to reality television on a 7-point scale. The exemplars of reality programs given to the participants included *Survivor*, *The Real World*, and *The Bachelor*; and these might be particularly appealing to extroverts because of their ability to provide topics of conversation with others, but might not extrapolate to other reality programs.

Certainly, the focus on extroversion brings us closer to an understanding of a personality characteristic that is repelled from reality television, rather than an understanding of the appeal of reality television. Thus, future research will need to explore a wider range of personality characteristics to start to understand more fully attraction to this genre. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the size of

this relation is small, suggesting that there are still other factors to identify in order to explain the selection (or, in this case, de-selection) of reality television.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that neuroticism was not associated with reality television exposure. Like Finn (1997) and Hall (2005), who also speculated but failed to find a significant correlation between media use and neuroticism, we speculate that neuroticism actually subsumes a diversity of personality traits. For example, neurotics' proclivity toward loneliness might attract them to the realistic characters on reality programming, but their tendency toward anxiousness repels them from the suspense and stress of some types of reality television. The balance, then, is a null relationship.

Our second objective was to examine the viewing motivations associated with reality television exposure. The HRM results showed that both ritualized and instrumental viewing motivations positively predicted reality television viewing, although, again, with modest effect sizes. This was surprising because it suggests that the viewing motivations do not differentiate the decision to select or avoid reality television viewing; rather, they both predicted the selection of reality television. Perhaps individuals are motivated to watch reality television viewing for both reasons simultaneously; or alternatively, instrumental viewers might be attracted to certain reality programs, whereas ritualistic viewers are attracted to other reality programs.

In particular, the ritualized viewing motivations were positively associated with surveillance and romantic reality programs, suggesting that the needs for entertainment and relaxation were satisfied by these particular types of reality programming. However, the instrumental viewing motivations were also positively associated with all types of reality television exposure, with the exception of romantic reality programming. These results run counter to the assumption that people motivated to view television for instrumental reasons (i.e., for arousal, for conversation fodder, or for information about the world) would not be attracted to reality programming because other types of television viewing, such as current events and news programming, would more likely satisfy those needs (Rubin, 1983). The developmental period of the participants in this sample probably plays a role here. It appears that reality television does satisfy those instrumental needs for these college-aged viewers, perhaps because it provides programming that their peers are not only watching (Frank, 2003), but also programming that features people of their age group (e.g., *Laguna Beach* and *The Real World*), which gives them relevant information about the world around them, perhaps informing their expectations about how they should behave, interact, dress, and so forth. As Hill (2005) argued, reality television can teach people about their own behaviors and identities by observing the behaviors and identities of others. Thus, it would make sense that these shows would be appealing to instrumental viewers.

The final objective of this study was to test a two-stage model in which we investigated whether personality contributes to viewing motivations, which, in turn, contributes to reality television exposure. These analyses extend current U&G research, which has theorized such links in the context of violent media exposure (Haridakis, 2002; Krcmar & Kean, 2005). Whereas U&G research has investigated the personality

correlates of genre viewing (Finn, 1997; Hall, 2005; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004; Rubin, 2002) or the viewing motivations of genre viewing (for a review, see Rubin, 2002), our study attempted to unite these two streams of research by investigating the extent to which viewing motivations bridges personality and reality television selection. Overall, the findings provide only tenuous support for these models.

In the case of instrumental viewing motivations, the findings supported the case for a combined effect of both component paths of the two-stage model (i.e., the link between personality and viewing motivations and the link between viewing motivations and reality television). First, extroversion was positively associated with instrumental viewing motivations, which is in line with Weaver's (2000) study, showing that extroverts were not likely to watch television passively; rather, they were motivated to view television that had social utility to them. Hall (2005) also argued that media which provide information useful to the development of personal relationships may appeal to extroverts. Second, instrumental viewing motivations were positively associated with the selection of reality television viewing; and, as we have already argued, this might be because reality television teaches young reality viewers much about their lives by observing others. Thus, this perspective gives credit to viewers' backgrounds—both in terms of their personalities and their gratifications sought—as possible antecedents for the selection of television genres.

Still, the model deserves some context and attention to the issue of direct effects versus indirect effects. In the case of extroversion, the personality characteristics exhibited a negative direct effect, but the indirect effect through instrumental viewing motivations was significant and positive. How might we make sense of these seemingly contradictory findings? We offer two explanations—one statistical and one conceptual. First, one way to interpret this model is that the introduction of instrumental viewing motivations suppresses the direct relationship between extroversion and reality television selection. Indeed, the direct effect of extroversion on reality television exposure was much stronger (standardized path coefficient = $-.15$) than the indirect effect (standardized indirect effect = $.03$). In this case, the instrumental viewing motivations variable is probably acting as a suppressor variable, although mediation is still occurring (MacKinnon et al., 2007). Second, a conceptual interpretation of the model is that, in general, extroverts avoid reality television, unless they are motivated by instrumental viewing motivations. If that is the case, they might seek reality television, although this "route" through the instrumental viewing motivation explains much less of reality selection than does extroversion directly.

In contrast, instrumental viewing motivations were *negatively* predicted by neuroticism. Based on the rationale that extroverts would be motivated to learn about the world around them from television because this might aid subsequent social interactions, it makes sense that neurotics would not have instrumental viewing motivations for the same reason—that is, they would want to avoid social interactions; thus, the instrumental motivations would not appeal to them. Rather, neurotics would be attracted to television because it allows them to escape social contact (Conway & Rubin, 1991; Shim & Paul, 2007). The direct effects of the relations between neuroticism and reality television selection (and its sub-genres) were not statistically significant.

Therefore, in this case, the small effect of neuroticism on reality television selection only occurs through instrumental viewing motivations.

Surprisingly, ritualistic viewing motivations did not mediate the relations between the personality and reality television variable because the ritualistic viewing motivations were not predicted by either extroversion or neuroticism. Thus, the tenuous support for the two-stage model was only found for the instrumental viewing motivations.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is not without limitations. One of the most pressing is that the use of an undergraduate sample inevitably raises questions about generalizability. More research is needed to determine if the results are replicable with more diverse audiences. In addition, there were also several limitations regarding measurement. For example, it was rather unfortunate that psychoticism could not be used as a personality factor. Given the amount of competition and conflict in reality television, we originally speculated that psychoticism would be positively related to reality viewing, especially the competition sub-genre, but we were not able to test that hypothesis. Future research should use another measure of global personality: The commonly used Five-Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is an obvious choice. In addition, given the lack of cohesion among the programs in the reality television genre, we used an EFA to determine which reality shows hang together to form sub-genres. Still, such a data-driven approach limits the possibility of future research to replicate this research with identical exposure categories. Finally, we recognize that we were working with a large number of variables, resulting in a relatively large number of significance tests, which increased our chances of Type 1 error in interpreting the data.

Another logical next step in this research trajectory is to examine the effects of reality television on viewers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. For example, focusing on the excessive amount of conflict in reality television (Mendible, 2004), recent research has shown that exposure to reality television is related to viewers' use of conflict in their interpersonal relationships, their use of deception and manipulation, and a negative view of humanity (Aubrey, et al., 2007). Indeed, because reality television appears to gratify both instrumental and ritualized needs, we argue that reality television has the potential to be quite effective in transmitting cultural and social values. If the viewer is motivated to view reality television to learn about a specific topic, relationship, event, and so on, we can argue that he or she could have anticipated the message from the genre, and that he or she might even watch the genre in order to get this message (Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004). Alternatively, if the viewer is motivated to watch reality television in order to be passively amused, he or she still might acquire beliefs through "incidental learning" (Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004, p. 313) by which the viewer attains information, although it was not the gratification originally sought. Accordingly, the gratification context of reality television seems crucial. To that end, we hope that this study's aim to further understand what motivates reality television viewing will stimulate future research exploring the effects of reality

television exposure on attitudes and beliefs, especially with regard to how personalities and motivations interact to explain these effects.

Notes

- [1] We limited reality shows to two categories: (a) established reality programs, such as *American Idol* and *Survivor*, which would be well-known to participants; and (b) reality shows that were airing at the time of data collection (October–November 2005).
- [2] Omitted programs included *The Apprentice*, *Martha Stewart*, *Fight for Fame*, *For Love or Money*, *Hell's Kitchen*, *Hit Me Baby One More Time*, *Kill Reality*, *Three Wishes*, and *Wife Swap*.
- [3] We decided a rotation of the matrix was in order because in the unrotated solution, 18 of the 24 shows loaded most strongly on the first factor. A rotated solution (via varimax rotation) yielded more interpretable results than the unrotated solution.
- [4] Six programs—*America's Next Top Model*, *American Idol*, *The Biggest Loser*, *Dancing With the Stars*, *Average Joe*, and *The Apprentice*—were deleted because they did not load on any of these factors or because they cross-loaded on multiple factors.
- [5] To eliminate the alternative explanation that the variance accounted for by the personality scales and the demographic factors overlap enough that multicollinearity obscures our ability to evaluate the influence of the personality variables on the exposure variables, we evaluated the variance inflation factor (VIF) at each stage of the model to detect multicollinearity. For the total reality television model, the VIF ranged from 1.04 to 1.16 on Block 1, from 1.04 to 1.18 on Block 2, and from 1.08 to 2.28 on Block 3; and given that multicollinearity is not generally judged to be an issue unless the VIF is 5.0 or greater (Allison, 1999), we concluded that multicollinearity did not substantially impact the results.
- [6] For extroversion on total reality television exposure through instrumental viewing motivation: z score product = 17.33, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = .03.
- [7] For neuroticism on total reality television exposure through instrumental viewing motivation: z score product = 12.67, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = .03.
- [8] For competition reality exposure: z score product = 7.00, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = .01; for romantic reality exposure: z score product = 6.21, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = .01; for surveillance reality exposure: z score product = 15.42, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = .03; and for makeover/lifestyle reality exposure: z score product = 8.33, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = .02.
- [9] For competition reality exposure: z score product = 8.37, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = $-.01$; for romantic reality exposure: z score product = 7.13, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = $-.01$; for surveillance reality exposure: z score product = 16.95, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = $-.03$; and for makeover/lifestyle reality exposure: z score product = 9.69, $p < .001$; standardized specific indirect effect = $-.02$.
- [10] We did not run the analogous model for ritualistic viewing motivations mediating personality and reality sub-genres because Figure 3 demonstrated that the component path between the personality variables and the ritualized viewing motivation was not significant; therefore, mediation could not occur.

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