

Chapter XXXVII

Celebrity–Persona Identification Scale

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BACKGROUND

The *celebrity-persona parasocial identification scale* (CPI) is designed to measure how media consumers develop identification with celebrities or popular fictional characters. Identification is defined as a persuasion process that occurs when an individual adopts the behavior or attitudes of another individual or group based on a self-defining relationship (Kelman, 1961, p. 63). Identification is a psychological orientation through which individuals define themselves based on their group membership and derive “strength and a sense of identity” from the affiliation (Kelman, 1961, p.64).

Identification is a fundamental process of social change that has been discussed by several important theorists and social scientists. Freud (1922, p. 29) defined identification as “the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another

person.” Lasswell (1965) also discussed the concept, referring to mass identifications such as nationalism. Johnson, Johnson, and Heimberg (1999) traced the concept of identification to both Freud and Lasswell.

According to Burke, identification occurs when one individual shares the interests of another individual or believes that he or she shares the interests of another (1969, p. 180). Burke noted that two individuals could be joined and still be distinct. He conceptualized identification as compensatory to division (Burke, 1969, p. 182). Burke used another concept, consubstantiality, to further explain identification, positing that things are consubstantial when they share the same nature of substance (Burke, 1969, p. 180). In a pragmatic sense, identification is simply the common ground held by people in communication (Rosenfeld, 1969). Although Burke focused on the efforts of speakers to identify with their intended

audiences, identification is also a way in which an audience member can say to a communicator, "I am like you" or "I have the same interests as you" (Cheney, 1983, p. 147).

Identification has been studied in a number of mediated contexts (see Woodward, 2003), especially with regards to sports fans (Basil, 1996; Basil & Brown, 2004; Matviuk, 2006). Fans frequently view a team or a player as an extension of themselves. A significant body of research has explored identification and sport fan affiliation because identification provides a foundation for understanding many of the unique psychological processes associated with sport fans.

Identification is often confused or entangled with parasocial interaction. Although both parasocial interaction and identification are both forms of audience involvement, they are distinct processes (Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003b, Brown & Fraser, 2006). Parasocial interaction often predicts identification because people commonly seek to adopt the values, beliefs, and behaviors of celebrities and media persona whom they admire. However, there are examples of celebrities that fans have strong parasocial interaction with, and yet the fans do not want to be like that person (Matviuk, 2006).

RELIABILITY

The CPI has been found to be very reliable, achieving Cronbach alpha reliability scores of .87 or higher (Bocarnea, 2001; Matviuk, 2006). Brown, Basil and Bocarnea (2003a) used many of the scale items in their study of identification with Princess Diana, and achieved an alpha coefficient of .87.

VALIDITY

Several studies have been conducted of identification with celebrities (Basil, 1996; Fraser & Brown,

2002) using many of the items in the CPI scale. Construct and criterion-related validity has been supported in studies by Bocarnea (2001), Brown, Basil and Bocarnea (2003b), and Matviuk (2006). Identification with baseball star Mark McGwire predicted increased desire to use androstenedione and to support child abuse prevention, while identification with soccer legend Diego Maradona predicted increased awareness of drug abuse and increased support for drug prevention programs. Identification has also been predicted by strong parasocial relationships with well-liked celebrities (Brown et al., 2003b).

RESULTS

The CPI online survey includes the 20 items of the Likert-type scale. Participants are asked to rank their level of agreement with statements about their identification with celebrities on a five-level scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

The online instrument was created and published using SurveySuite. This survey generation tool, provided by the University of Virginia, is located at <http://intercom.virginia.edu/SurveySuite>. After a 14-day free trial period, an annual fee is required to continue the service. The service includes online survey creation and administration, and tallying results. Additionally, all data collected are made available in a format compatible with any statistical software. Such statistical software is required for any analyses beyond summarized descriptive statistics.

Given the fact that CPI data are usually combined with measurements of other conceptual variables in media studies, no demographic data are collected. The simple design allows potential users to combine CPI data with other variables of interest, ensuring the good portability of a modular instrument. Furthermore, minor editing allows the instrument to be adapted to the celebrity or media persona of interest.

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