

THE EFFECT OF EXPERIENCE-TAKING AND EXPOSURE TO REALITY TELEVISION
ON NARCISSISM

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ABSTRACT

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by Ian Hawkins

With the significant increase in reality television viewing since the year 2000 it is important to investigate how watching these shows is affecting viewers. In the genre of reality television, shows with narcissistic characters seem to be highly popular. Shows like *Jersey Shore* and *Real Housewives* have become wildly popular with certain demographics, and have become part of our everyday culture. The current study will evaluate how identifying or distancing yourself from the characters in narcissistic reality shows will impact a viewers' level of narcissism. Participants watched either a narcissistic reality show or a comedy. To manipulate how the participants identified with the characters in the show half were exposed to a fake news article meant to lead participants to highly identify with the characters. The other participants read a fake news article meant to lead participants to distance themselves from the characters. The level of narcissism and level of experience-taking were measured.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Effect of Experience-taking and Exposure of Reality Television on Narcissism

“Back in the day, they had a prophecy: that one day there would be a pimp of all pimps, and his name would be The Situation”-The Situation.

“Everybody loves me, babies, dogs, ya know, hot girls, cougars. I just have unbelievable mass appeal”-The Situation.

In December 2009 the world was exposed for the first time to the MTV show *Jersey Shore*. *Jersey Shore* became one of the most popular TV shows ever for individuals in the young adult age group, becoming MTV’s most watched series telecast ever (Gorman, 2011). The quotes above show why *Jersey Shore* is often seen as being one of the most narcissistic shows on television. Given the broad exposure of these narcissistic characters to their audience, it’s reasonable to wonder whether their narcissism leads to changes in their viewers. When investigating the effect of viewing narcissistic reality shows it may be useful to first look at how narcissism in this country has been changing.

Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell and Bushman (2008a) found that American college students have scored progressively higher on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) from the early 1980’s extending to 2006. The authors found a significant positive correlation between year of data collection and NPI score, meaning that the more recent students also had higher NPI scores. They also found that almost two-thirds of college students who graduated recently were above the mean of the time period 1979-1985, documenting a 30% increase overall (see also, Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell & Bushman 2008b). In an update of a previous meta-analysis Twenge and Foster (2010) again found that when controlled for campus, NPI scores

were still showing an increase. The updated meta-analysis included data from 2006-2009 on top of the data that had already been collected. Twenge and Foster (2010) found that 30% of college students now score higher than 21 on the NPI, whereas in the early 1980's only 19% scored above 21. They also found that when NPI scores were evaluated within ethnic groups, scores have increased significantly in the time period of 2002-2007 for all groups. The two largest ethnic groups in the sample (white and Asian American) also showed the largest increase in NPI scores. Although there is a large amount of evidence showing that narcissism is increasing, there is still some disagreement (for opposing view see Trzesniewski, et al. 2008).

If narcissism is increasing, a reasonable question would be, Why? Very little evidence has been provided regarding what could cause this increase, though there has been speculation regarding the cause. For example, Twenge, et al. (2008) speculates that school based self-esteem programs, which are taught to all students, not just students with low self-esteem, may be harmful. They compare this to giving all children Ritalin when only a few have ADHD. Recent data suggests that the state of the economy when entering young adulthood may also influence an individual's level of narcissism. Bianchi (2014) found people entering adulthood during a recession were less narcissistic than people who entered adulthood during a prosperous economy. More relevant to the current research, some have speculated that celebrities might be "super spreaders" of narcissism (Pinsky & Young, 2006). A recent survey found that celebrities have higher levels of narcissism than the general population, and that reality TV celebrities have the highest levels of all (Young & Pinsky, 2006). The narcissistic individuals in these shows are considered by some to be negative role models (Young & Pinsky, 2006). Little research, however, has directly examined how exposure to these reality TV celebrities affects viewers. In

the current research I test whether exposure to such celebrity narcissism can alter the narcissism of viewers.

Motives for Viewing Reality TV

According to the A.C. Nielsen Co, the average American watches four hours of TV a day. Over the past 15 years, much of the available viewing material has shifted to reality TV shows. In 2000 there were 4 reality shows on TV, but by 2012 that number had jumped to 320. With the recent influx of reality shows it is important to look at motives for why people watch these shows as well as how viewing reality TV may impact viewers. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) found that the two biggest motives for people watching reality TV were habitual pastime and reality entertainment. The authors note that for many viewers, reality TV is such an important habitual pastime that it often becomes a daily ritual. For the reality entertainment motivation factor the authors explain that viewers were drawn to the novelty of reality TV, especially when compared to regular fictional TV programming. They also found that individuals who watched reality TV for the previous two listed motives were also more likely to view reality TV as being more realistic. The authors state that reality TV is being used as a substitute channel for experiences in people with low mobility and low levels of interpersonal interaction. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) found that more status-oriented individuals are more likely to watch reality TV and to report enjoying it as well. They describe these status-oriented people as wanting to feel self -important. They also suggest that some viewers may view themselves as superior to the ordinary people on the shows thus increasing their feeling of self-importance. They also speculate that some viewers may view people on reality TV as being similar to themselves and this gives them a chance to fantasize that they themselves could become famous by being on TV. This suggests that some people are able to relate to certain characters because

they see themselves as being similar, but others may not relate well because they believe they are superior to the characters they are watching. Although the people who watch it often see reality TV as being real, producers may pick people for the show they believe viewers will tune in to see. Producers are likely to pick individuals who are going to cause conflict and therefore may choose people with negative characteristics.

Given that other research has documented both a desire to feel superior to reality TV characters, and identification with the characters as motives for watching, I suggest that separate psychological processes are more likely depending upon which approach viewers use when watching a reality show. First, when viewers watch because they enjoy feeling superior to the characters, it seems likely that they would remain psychologically separate from the characters. This may lead viewers to compare themselves to the characters similar to the process of social comparison first proposed by Festinger (1954). Alternatively, when viewers closely identify with characters they are watching they may even begin to view the events of the show as if they were happening to them. Rather than comparing themselves to the characters, they begin to experience the events happening to the characters as if they were happening to themselves. Recent research calls this process experience taking (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). These two responses to the viewing experience are potentially quite different and could lead to quite different consequences in viewers. Social comparison involves directly comparing oneself to another person. This comparison, whether it is positive or negative, will often identify differences between the viewer and the TV personality. In contrast, experience-taking is defined as occurring when the media consumer lets go “of key components of their own identity—such as their beliefs, memories, personality traits, and ingroup affiliations—and instead assumes the identity of a protagonist, accepting the character’s decisions, outcomes, and reactions as their own” (Kaufman & Libby,

2012, p.2). In this case, the viewer does not compare himself or herself with the other person but rather relates to them almost as if the events happening to the character are happening to themselves (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). I will now explore how these different modes of viewing are likely to affect viewers in different ways.

Social Comparison and Media

How might remaining detached, and engaging in social comparison with the characters influence viewers? A large body of research suggests that viewers often compare themselves to media images. For example, Yang and Oliver (2010) found that heavy viewing of American television programs can lead to lower life satisfaction. They also found that upward social comparison seems to be a mechanism for this decrease in life satisfaction, especially in individuals with lower economic status. The media can also impact how individuals view their own bodies. Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2009) found that when males were exposed to commercials involving other males who had the ideal muscular appearance it led viewers to have lower muscle satisfaction and physical attractiveness satisfaction. The authors found that men who cared the most about their appearance were the most vulnerable as well as being the participants who engaged in the most upward social comparison. Smeesters, Mussweiler, and Mandel (2009) found that behavior changed when participants with either a high or low BMI were exposed to a media image of an individual that had the opposite BMI as the participants. By manipulating the likelihood of social comparison Morrison, Kalin and Morrison (2004) found that both males and females are affected by comparison to unrealistic images. For males, the extent they engaged in social comparison predicted appearance self-esteem, number of diets used to gain weight and even steroid use. For females the extent they engaged in social comparison also predicted appearance self-esteem as well as number of diets to lose weight and the use of

weight control strategies. Sohn (2009) found social comparison to people on television decreased the perceptual body gap for men but increased the perceptual body gap for women. This shows that comparing their bodies to people on television caused women to feel worse about their bodies. These studies, and others, suggest that people can and do compare themselves with people they encounter in media. Such comparison processes are likely to lead to contrast effects, with viewers recognizing how they are different from those they see in media. It is not always the case, however, that media is consumed in this detached, objective way.

Experience Taking and Media

Given that some viewers may instead identify closely with a character and engage in experience taking, what are the likely consequences for these viewers? In these instances, viewers may begin to respond to the media as if they were a part of the story themselves. If an individual is adopting the mindset of a character and really immersing themselves in the TV show, they are most likely not going to be comparing themselves to the character. Thus, any manipulation that would increase experience-taking is also likely to reduce social comparison. I propose that by increasing experience-taking, viewers will empathize or relate with the characters they are watching. Participants who read a story while engaging in greater experience taking were more likely to adopt attitudes and beliefs of the main character in the story. Kaufman and Libby manipulated experience taking by manipulating the participant's self-concept accessibility. By increasing self-concept accessibility they were able to decrease experience-taking. By decreasing self-concept accessibility they were able to increase experience-taking. Kaufman and Libby were able to show an individual's level of experience-taking can be manipulated, at least for those reading a story about a person. By applying this idea to TV viewing, I hope to get an individual to not make a comparison but rather to immerse themselves

in a TV show and relate to characters in a TV show. I propose that such experience taking is more likely to lead to assimilation effects rather than contrast effects, with the viewer becoming more like the characters they are watching. One goal of the current research is to evaluate how increasing or decreasing experience taking will alter viewer's narcissism after exposure to these shows.

Recent research from our lab examined viewer's level of narcissism after exposure to reality TV, with no attempt to manipulate experience taking. Data showed a non-significant trend such that people watching a family themed reality TV show (*Little People Big World*, or the *Little Couple*) showed higher levels of narcissism than those watching a more narcissistic reality show (*Jersey Shore* and *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*). This was driven by a trend for those watching the family themed reality shows to have higher scores on the body image subscale of the NPI. We speculate that participants who watched these two shows were potentially making downward physical social comparisons with the little people who were portrayed in these family themed shows, which led them to view their body more positively. This suggests that participants may naturally approach such shows with a tendency to engage in social comparison. This would be consistent with research suggesting that viewers approach such shows with a voyeuristic mindset that leads them to watch the shows as outsiders looking in on a different experience (e.g., Baruh, 2010). In contrast, if experience taking is facilitated, the opposite may occur. Participants who experience take while watching *Jersey Shore* or *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* should come to adopt traits similar to the characters portrayed in those shows. A follow up study from our lab attempted to facilitate experience taking using the same strategy used by Kaufman and Libby (2012). In their research, they created higher levels of experience taking for students reading a story by telling them that their data would be aggregated, and that

the researchers were not interested in their responses as individuals. We attempted to use a similar instructional manipulation for students prior to watching one of the TV shows. In addition, we included a manipulation to inhibit experience taking and increase social comparison with the characters. This was done by placing a mirror next to participants as they watched the show, thereby increasing self-awareness. Data suggest that increasing self-awareness while viewing a narcissistic reality show successfully reduced experience taking, and actually decreased participants' narcissism. The manipulation to increase experience taking, however, was not successful. Participants told that we weren't interested in their individual responses did not report more experience taking, nor did they show higher levels of narcissism following exposure to the narcissistic reality show. In fact, participants in the narcissistic reality show condition showed significantly lower levels of experience taking than those exposed to the family themed reality show or the comedy.

The results of this study suggest that a more powerful manipulation is necessary in order to increase experience taking for those viewing the narcissistic reality show. A simple strategy that could potentially increase experience-taking might be to provide information that interacting with media while experience-taking is likely to increase enjoyment. People are generally motivated to maximize enjoyment, and by suggesting that identifying with characters in media will increase enjoyment, participants may be more likely to do so. Some other research has shown that catharsis beliefs of participants can be manipulated in similar ways, and those reading a bogus summary of pro-catharsis research responded by seeking out cathartic opportunities (Bushman, Baumeister, & Stack, 1999; Bushman & Whitaker, 2010). The authors of these studies discuss how participants accepted the message of the bogus article and then applied it to their situation. I propose that using a similar bogus news story either supporting or rejecting

experience taking as an enjoyable way to consume media can lead viewers to adopt either experience taking or social comparison strategies when viewing reality TV. The literature reviewed to this point leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Using bogus news stories that purport greater enjoyment of media when identification with the characters is maximized (or minimized) will affect identification leading to increased (or decreased) experience-taking.

H2: Increased identification while viewing the narcissistic reality shows will lead to higher levels of viewer narcissism.

H3a: Decreased identification while watching a narcissistic reality show will lead to decreased levels of narcissism.

H3b: Increased identification while watching a comedy show will not lead to changes in narcissism.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 86 students (56 female, 30 male) at Central Michigan University who received extra credit for their participation.

Materials

Shows

Participants watched one of four shows in this study. *Jersey Shore* (Jersey Shore, 2009) first aired on MTV in December of 2009. This show follows the lives of eight room mates as they as spend their summers at the jersey shore and winters in other locations over the course of six seasons. *The Real World: Las Vegas* (The Real World, 2010) first aired on MTV in March of 2011. This show follows eight strangers who live together over a course of time. This was the 25th season of *The Real World*. *The Office* (The Office, 2005) first aired on NBC in March of 2005. It is an adaptation of BBC series that shares the same name. This show follows the lives of fictional employees who work at a paper company. *Friends* (Friends, 2001) first aired in on NBC in September of 1994. Friends was on air for ten seasons, and follows a fictional group of friends.

NPI

The 40 question NPI Raskin and Terry (1988) can be broken down into 7 subscales that describe typical behaviors of narcissistic individuals. The authority subscale includes forced choice questions such as, “I am not sure if I would make a good leader” or “I see myself as good leader”. The self-sufficiency subscale includes forced choice questions such as, “I sometimes

depend on people to get things done” or “I rarely depend on anyone to get things done”. The superiority subscale includes forced choice questions such as, “I am much like everyone else” or “I am an extraordinary person”. The exhibitionism subscale includes forced choice questions such as, “Modesty doesn’t become me” or “I am essentially a modest person”. The exploitative subscale includes forced choice questions such as, “I can read people like a book” or “People are sometimes hard to understand”. The vanity subscale includes forced choice questions such as, “I don’t particularly like to show off my body” or “I like to display my body”. Finally, the entitlement subscale includes forced choice questions like, “I expect a great deal from other people” or “I like to do things for other people.

Experience-Taking

The experience-taking scale (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) was modified slightly to apply to television, and included 7 questions such as, “I felt I could put myself in the shoes of the character in the show”, “I found myself feeling what the character in the show was feeling” and “I empathize with the situation of the character in the show”.

Procedure

The participants arrived at the study and read and signed a consent form. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four different conditions in a 2 (type of show) x 2 (identification valence) factorial design. Participants began by answering basic questions such as how many hours of TV they watch every week as well as what type of shows were their favorite. Participants were randomly assigned to watch a show in one of two categories: narcissistic reality shows, or comedies. To increase experience sampling (Wells & Windschitl, 1998) different shows were sampled in each category of show. Within the narcissistic reality

genre, some participants watched *Jersey shore* and others watched *The Real World*. Within the comedy genre, some participants watched *Friends* and others watched *The Office*. This manipulation was crossed with experimental instructions designed to either increase or decrease identification with the characters, thereby increasing or decreasing experience taking. Participants in the positive identification condition read a fake news article (Appendix C) stating that people enjoyed TV shows more when they immerse themselves in the story and are able to relate to the characters. Participants in the negative identification condition read a fake news article (Appendix C) stating that people enjoyed TV shows more when they distanced themselves from the characters in the show and watched it like an outsider. Participants then watched their assigned TV show. After watching the TV show, they took the standard 40 question NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988; see Appendix A), items measuring enjoyment of the show, and an experience taking measure (Kaufman & Libby, 2012; Appendix B). After taking these measures the participants were debriefed and excused.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Cronbach's Alpha

The experience-taking scale consisted of 7 items ($\alpha=.76$). The NPI consisted of 40 items ($\alpha=.80$). The NPI vanity subscale consisted of 3 items ($\alpha=.73$), the NPI exploitative subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha=.48$). The NPI authority subscale consisted of 8 items ($\alpha=.70$), the NPI self-sufficiency subscale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha=.27$). The NPI superiority subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha=.55$), the NPI exhibitionism subscale consisted of 7 items ($\alpha=.65$). The NPI entitlement subscale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha=.42$).

Comparison of TV Shows within Each Category

For this study I used four different television shows, two each from the reality TV genre (*Jersey Shore*, *The Real World*) and the scripted comedy genre (*The Office*, and *Friends*). In order to determine whether participants responded similarly to the different shows within each category, I carried out separate *t*-tests comparing participants who saw the *Jersey Shore* and *The Real World* on both experience taking and the NPI, and comparing participants who saw *The Office* and *Friends* on both measures. Independent *t*-tests showed there was a significant difference in experience-taking scores between participants who watched *Jersey Shore* ($M=31.4$, $SD=8.8$) compared to *The Real World* ($M=40.1$, $SD=8.8$), $t(41)=3.23$, $p<.05$. People who watched *The Office* ($M=42.3$, $SD=6.3$) did not significantly differ from those who watched *Friends* ($M=39.5$, $SD=8.9$), $t(41)=1.17$, $p>.05$. For the NPI, participants who watched *The Office* ($M=12.76$, $SD=4.2$) did not significantly differ from those who watched *Friends* ($M=15.91$,

($SD=6.8$), $t(41)=1.80$, $p>.05$. Those who watched *Jersey Shore* ($M=15.23$, $SD=7.2$) did not significantly differ from those who watched *The Real World* ($M=17.24$, $SD=5.0$), $t(41)=1.05$, $p>.05$. When looking at how the sexes differed between the shows there were no sex differences found between the shows for experience-taking. When looking at differences between shows for the NPI, a 2(show) x 2(sex) ANOVA found a significant main effect of sex on NPI, $F(1,39)=5.48$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.12$. Such that males watching *Jersey Shore* or *The Real World* ($M=18.4$, $SD=6.4$) had significantly higher NPI scores compared to females ($M=14.4$, $SD=5.5$). There were no sex differences for *The Office* and *Friends*.

Other Variables

A 2 (type of show) x 2(identification valence) x 2 (sex) ANOVA found a significant main effect of type of show on enjoyment, $F(1, 78)=34.95$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.30$. Such that those watching a narcissistic reality show experienced significantly less enjoyment ($M=5.3$, $SD=1.9$) than those who watched a scripted comedy ($M=7.8$, $SD=1.5$). For enjoyment none of the other main effects or interactions were significant. A 2 (type of show) x 2(identification valence) x 2 (sex) ANOVA found a significant main effect of type of show on how regularly they watch the show, $F(1, 78)=12.98$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.14$. Such that participants reported having more regularly watched the scripted comedies ($M=4.5$, $SD=2.3$) than the narcissistic reality shows, ($M=2.7$, $SD=1.6$). None of the other main effects or interactions were significant. When looking at if participants would like to see more of the show they watched a 2 (type of show) x 2(identification valence) x 2 (sex) ANOVA found a significant main effect of type of show, $F(1, 78)=40.58$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.34$. Such that those who watched the scripted comedies wanted to see more of the show, ($M=7.3$, $SD=1.7$)

compared to those who watched the narcissistic reality show, ($M=4.1$, $SD=2.4$). None of the other main effects or interactions were significant.

Primary Analyses

Experience-Taking

For all ANOVA's reported subsequently, adding of familiarity with the show as a covariate did not cause any change in the results of the analysis. A 2(type of show) x 2(Identification valence) x 2(sex) ANOVA found a main effect of identification valence on experience-taking, $F(1,78)=7.92$, $p<.01$, $\eta_p^2=.092$, such that those in the positive identification condition had higher experience-taking scores ($M=41.2$, $SD=8.1$) than those in the negative identification conditions ($M=35.2$, $SD=9.2$). Thus, the identification manipulation was successful. Type of show also had a significant effect on experience-taking scores, $F(1, 78)=6.37$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.076$, such that those who watched a narcissistic reality show had lower experience-taking scores ($M=35.6$, $SD= 9.7$) than those who watched a scripted comedy ($M=40.9$, $SD=7.8$). No other main or interactive effects were significant, all F 's <1 .

NPI Scores

A 2(type of show) x 2(identification valence) x 2(sex) ANOVA found a marginally significant main effect of type of show on NPI scores, $F(1, 78)= 3.36$, $p=.07$. Those watching the reality shows were more narcissistic than those watching the comedies. The main effect of identification valence was not significant, $F(1, 78)= <1$. The main effect of sex was also non-significant, $F(1, 78)= 1.55$, $p>.05$. The interaction between type of show and identification valence was significant, $F(1, 78)=5.00$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.061$ (see Table 1).

Table 1. *The effect of type of show and identification valence on the NPI*

	<u>Narcissistic Reality</u>	<u>Scripted Comedy</u>	<u>Total ID</u>
Positive ID	<i>M</i> = 17.9 <i>SE</i> = 1.2	<i>M</i> = 12.3 <i>SE</i> = 1.6	<i>M</i> = 15.1 <i>SE</i> = 1.4
Negative ID	<i>M</i> =15.0 <i>SE</i> = 1.2	<i>M</i> = 15.6 <i>SE</i> = 1.3	<i>M</i> = 15.3 <i>SE</i> = 1.2
Total TS	<i>M</i> =16.45 <i>SE</i> = 1.2	<i>M</i> = 13.95 <i>SE</i> = 1.45	

A test for simple effects showed that for those in the positive identification condition, watching a narcissistic reality show led to significantly higher NPI scores than watching a scripted comedy, $t(42)= 2.01, p=.05$. Those in the negative identification condition who watched a narcissistic show did not differ from those who watched a scripted comedy, $t(40)=-.134, p>.05$.

The 3-way interaction was also significant, $F(1, 78)=4.50, p<.05, \eta_p^2 = .055$ (see Table 2).

Table 2. *The effect of type of show, identification valence and sex on the NPI*

	<u>Narcissistic Reality</u>	<u>Scripted Comedy</u>
Positive ID	Male <i>M</i> = 21.5 <i>SE</i> = 1.9	Male <i>M</i> =10.5 <i>SE</i> = 2.9
	Female <i>M</i> = 14.3 <i>SE</i> =1.6	Female <i>M</i> = 14.1 <i>SE</i> =1.3
Negative ID	Male <i>M</i> = 15.7 <i>SE</i> =1.8	Male <i>M</i> =16.7 <i>SE</i> = 2.2
	Female <i>M</i> =14.4 <i>SE</i> = 1.7	Female <i>M</i> = 14.5 <i>SE</i> = 1.5

Test for simple effects were carried out separately for males and females. For males, there was a significant main effect of type of show on NPI scores, $F(1, 26)=4.96, p<.05$. The interaction between type of show and identification valence was also significant, $F(1,26)=7.16, p<.05$. A test for simple effects on this interaction showed that males in the positive identification condition had significantly higher NPI scores when they watched a narcissistic reality show compared to when they watched a scripted comedy, $t(11)=3.09, p<.05$. For males in the negative identification condition there was no significant difference in NPI scores between those who watched a narcissistic reality show or a comedy, $t(15)=.362, p>.05$. For female participants, no main or interactive effects were significant, all F 's < 1.

NPI Subcales

The NPI can be broken down into 7 different subscales: authority, self-sufficiency, superiority, exhibitionism, exploitative, vanity and entitlement. A series of 2(type of show) x 2(identification valence) x 2(sex) ANOVA's were carried out on each subscale. I will report only significant effects. The ANOVA on the NPI vanity scores found a main effect of type of show, $F(1, 78)=6.72, p<.05, \eta_p^2 = .079$, such that those who watched a narcissistic show had higher scores ($M=1.51, SD=1.1$) than those who watched a scripted comedy ($M=.95, SD=1.0$). The main effects of identification valence and sex, as well as the interactions were not significant. To further explore NPI vanity scores a planned contrast were conducted. Participants who watched a narcissistic show and were in the positive identification condition had significantly higher vanity scores when compared to participants in the other conditions, $t(82)=2.4, p<.05$. For the NPI exploitative subscale none of the main effects were significant. The interaction between identification valence and type of show was significant, $F(1,78)=7.41, p<.05, \eta_p^2 = .087$ (see Table 3). A test of simple effects showed that when participants positively identified they did not have significantly different exploitative scores when they watched a comedy or a narcissistic reality show, $t(42)=.747, p>.05$. When participants negatively identified they had significantly higher exploitative scores when they watched a comedy compared to when they watched a narcissistic reality show, $t(40)=2.01, p=.051$.

Table 3. NPI exploitative interaction for type of show x identification valence

	<u>Narcissistic Reality</u>	<u>Scripted Comedy</u>
Positive ID	$M= 2.1 SE= .26$	$M= 1.5 SE= .34$
Negative ID	$M=1.0 SE= .27$	$M= 1.8 SE= .28$

The interaction between identification valence, type of show and sex was also significant, $F(1, 78)=7.09, p<.05, \eta_p^2 = .083$ (see Table 4). Test of simple effects were carried out separately for males and females. For males, type of show was non-significant, $F(1, 26)=1.15, p>.05$. Identification valence was also non-significant, $F(1,26)=.761, p>.05$. The interaction between type of show and identification valence was significant, $F(1, 26)= 10.04, p<.05$. A test for simple effects showed that males in the positive identification condition had higher exploitative scores after watching a narcissistic reality show compared to a comedy, $t(11)=2.43, p<.05$. When males were in the negative identification condition they had higher exploitative scores when they watched a comedy compared to a narcissistic reality show, $t(15)=1.84, p=.085$. For females the main effect of type of show was non-significant, $F(1, 52)=2.64, p>.05$. The main effect of identification valence was non-significant, $F(1, 52)=1.71, p>.05$. The interaction between type of show and identification valence was also non-significant, $F(1, 52)= .003, p>.05$.

Table 4. NPI exploitative interaction for type of show x identification valence x sex

	<u>Narcissistic Reality</u>	<u>Scripted Comedy</u>
<u>Positive ID</u>	<u>Male $M= 3.1 SE= .41$</u>	<u>Male $M=1.0 SE=.61$</u>
	<u>Female $M= 1.5 SE=.34$</u>	<u>Female $M= 2.0 SE=.29$</u>
<u>Negative ID</u>	<u>Male $M= 1.1 SE=.39$</u>	<u>Male $M=2.1 SE= .46$</u>
	<u>Female $M=1.0 SE= .37$</u>	<u>Female $M= 1.6 SE= .33$</u>

The table below shows all the results found for the NPI sub scales, significant results are marked by an x.

Table 5. Significant Results NPI Subscale

Subscale	MF Show	MF ID	MF Sex	Show x ID	Show x Sex	ID x Sex	Show xID x Sex
Authority							
Self-sufficiency							
Superiority							
Exhibitionism							
Exploitative				X			X
Entitlement							
Vanity	X						

Correlations

I carried out correlations between enjoyment of the program viewed, experience taking, and overall NPI score and NPI subscale scores. These correlations were carried out for the overall sample, and for each condition separately. Enjoyment was significantly correlated to experience-taking score in the overall sample, $r(86) = .55, p < .01$ (see table 6). In the reality show and positive identification condition NPI total was not significantly correlated with experience-taking score, $r(22) = .15, p > .05$ (see table 7). In the reality show and negative identification condition NPI total was not significantly correlated with experience-taking score, $r(21) = .338, p > .05$ (see table 8). In the comedy and positive identification condition NPI total was not significantly correlated with experience-taking score, $r(22) = -.079, p > .05$ (see table 9). Within the comedy and negative identification condition experience-taking significantly negatively correlated with NPI total, $r(21) = -.44, p < .05$ (see table 10).

Table 6. Overall result

Variable	Enjoy	Exp-take	NPI total	NPI vanity	NPI auth	NPI selfsuf	NPI superi	NPI exhi	NPI exploit	NPI entitle
Enjoy										
Exp-take	.550**									
NPI total	0.035	0.038								
NPI vanity	0.080	0.088	.638**							
NPI auth	0.052	-0.093	.703**	.235**						
NPI selfsuf	0.030	-0.180	0.386**	0.196	.281**					
NPI superi	0.000	-0.179	.639**	.495**	0.184	.314**				
NPI exhi	0.201	0.147	.704**	.563**	.344**	-0.055	.355**			
NPI exploit	0.009	0.036	.594**	0.126	.440**	0.013	.238*	.378**		
NPI entitle	0.052	0.024	.460**	0.173	0.184	-0.067	0.206	.260**	0.218	

Table 7. Narcissistic reality show and positive identification

Variable	Enjoy	Exp-take	NPI total	NPI vanity	NPI auth	NPI selfsuf	NPI superi	NPI exhi	NPI exploit	NPI entitle
Enjoy										
Exp-take	.640**									
NPI total	.384	.200								
NPI vanity	.547**	.456*	.582**							
NPI auth	.194	-.045	.711**	.200						
NPI selfsuf	.059	-.123	0.565**	0.117	.407					
NPI superi	0.119	-0.052	.722**	.491**	0.247	.639**				
NPI exhi	0.480*	.432*	.712**	.629**	.279	-0.044	.501**			
NPI exploit	0.073	0.108	.730**	0.245	.510**	0.205	.382	.565**		
NPI entitle	0.419	0.330	.558**	0.177	0.324	.187	0.116	.484*	0.432*	

Table 8. *Narcissistic reality show and negative identification*

Variable	Enjoy	Exp-take	NPI total	NPI vanity	NPI auth	NPI selfsuf	NPI superi	NPI exhi	NPI exploit	NPI entitle
Enjoy										
Exp-take	.537**									
NPI total	0.352	0.338								
NPI vanity	0.322	0.333	.644**							
NPI auth	0.381	.361	.783**	.384						
NPI selfsuf	0.185	-0.129	0.230	0.257	.003					
NPI superi	-0.066	-0.177	.578**	.317	0.244	.564**				
NPI exhi	0.263	0.314	.679**	.477**	.588**	-0.296	.345			
NPI exploit	-0.170	0.029	.369	-.103	.217	-.235	.027	.063		
NPI entitle	0.340	.488*	.536*	0.269	0.345	-0.303	-.155	.399	0.454*	

Table 9. *Comedy and positive identification*

Variable	Enjoy	Exp-take	NPI total	NPI vanity	NPI auth	NPI selfsuf	NPI superi	NPI exhi	NPI exploit	NPI entitle
Enjoy										
Exp-take	.203									
NPI total	0.205	-.079								
NPI vanity	0.387	0.348	.710**							
NPI auth	0.080	-.209	.765**	.355						
NPI selfsuf	0.080	.106	0.340	0.124	.210					
NPI superi	.186	-0.108	.425*	.381	0.109	.081				
NPI exhi	0.244	-.087	.685**	.572**	.460*	0.029	-.036			
NPI exploit	-.341	-.174	.653**	.299	.521*	.103	.233	.299		
NPI entitle	0.238	-.034	.241	0.070	0.042	-0.093	.101	.081	-.011	

Table 10. *Comedy and negative identification*

Variable	Enjoy	Exp- take	NPI total	NPI vanity	NPI auth	NPI selfsuf	NPI superi	NPI exhi	NPI exploit	NPI entitle
Enjoy										
Exp-take	.416									
NPI total	-.246	-.443*								
NPI vanity	-.132	-.531	.706**							
NPI auth	-.199	-.199	.686**	.110						
NPI selfsuf	0.150	-.280	0.231	0.211	.049					
NPI superi	-.116	-0.385	.713**	.750**	0.207	.066				
NPI exhi	-.123	-.204	.753**	.553**	.429*	-.105	.455*			
NPI exploit	-.118	-.384	.764**	.420	.732**	-.030	.386	.624**		
NPI entitle	-.494	-.109	.464*	0.289	0.133	.046	.378	.182	.070	

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

My study is the first to explore how character identification through experience-taking can affect an individual's level of narcissism. This study began because I wanted to explore why narcissism is increasing and what are possible causes of increased narcissism. The results I found in this study, I believe, sheds some light on one factor that could be contributing to increasing narcissism: identification with narcissistic characters on reality TV can lead to increased narcissism. Although the results in this regard were somewhat mixed I did find evidence to support this assertion. Although the main effect of type of show was not significant it approached significance and may reach significance with a few more participants. The two-way interaction between type of show and identification valence was significant and supported the hypothesis. This interaction showed higher NPI scores for male participants in the positive identification condition who watched a narcissistic show compared to those who watched a scripted comedy. For males who watched a narcissistic show to have significantly higher NPI scores in this situation is an important finding. This gives some credibility to the idea that experience taking when watching a narcissistic show can lead to higher NPI scores when compared to watching other shows. The three way interaction between identification valence, type of show, and sex showed a large disparity between males and females. Males were much more narcissistic than female participants, especially for those in the positive identification/narcissistic show condition. One reason this might have occurred has to do with the characters in the TV shows that participants watched. In the *Jersey Shore* the male characters seem potentially much more narcissistic than the female characters. Since participants identified with a character of their own

sex, this could have led males to identify with more narcissistic characters leading to higher NPI scores.

Hypothesis 3A suggested that decreased identification (lower experience-taking) would lower narcissism when participants watched a narcissistic show. I did not find any results to support this hypothesis. There may be various reasons for this. It's possible that not identifying with narcissistic characters is not enough to decrease narcissism for people who watch these shows. It may be necessary for viewers to engage in more formal social comparisons with the show's characters. Finally, hypothesis 3B, that increased experience taking while watching a scripted comedy would not affect narcissism was supported. I found no significant difference in participants NPI scores when comparing those in the positive and negative identification valence conditions. The narcissism results of this study pose some interesting questions that should be explored in future research.

One of the most interesting questions to explore is if identifying and watching a narcissistic show does lead to increased narcissism, is there a way protect viewers from the process leading to higher narcissism? One way I am currently exploring to do this is through mindfulness. Mindfulness manipulations put individuals into a state of increased self-awareness. This manipulation of self-awareness is different then the manipulation used in this study and may affect participants differently as well. Using a mindfulness manipulation to increase self-awareness might be strong enough to lower narcissism. The relationship between mindfulness and experience-taking is unknown. Being mindful could stop individuals from identifying with narcissistic characters. Mindfulness induces a state of self-awareness, which I believe will allow individuals to differentiate between themselves and negative characters like in *Jersey Shore* with

greater ease. This could lead to people having lower NPI scores when watching a show like *Jersey Shore*.

Experience-taking is a relatively new topic of research making this study one of the few that have explored the potential outcomes of experience-taking. This study is the first to successfully manipulate experience taking through the use of normative information about enjoyment of the show being watched. Hypothesis 1 stated that identification valence would affect identification, causing experience-taking to either increase or decrease. This finding was found across all conditions making it one of the stronger results in this study. Although the evidence for experience-taking was strong in most cases, participants who watched *Jersey Shore* showed significantly lower experience-taking scores than those who watched *The Real World*. This difference was almost nine points less overall. This presents an interesting question of why participants had such a difficult time engaging in experience taking with the characters in *Jersey Shore* compared to characters in the other shows. It may be that the characters in *Jersey Shore* are more well known than the characters in the other shows. *Jersey Shore* was one of the most successful shows in TV history for the age group we used in this study. Even if participants had never watched the show they might have heard negative things about the *Jersey Shore* characters from other sources. Being so well known, and maybe not for good reasons, may have led to less identification with the characters, and therefore lower experience-taking scores. In contrast Kaufman and Libby (2012) were able to get participants to identify with individuals who were seen as being part of an out group or having some sort of stigma. In their research, however, the actual character was unknown to the participant before the research began. This prior knowledge of the *Jersey Shore* characters may have made it more difficult to prompt our participants to engage in experience taking. Future research may benefit by exploring what factors affect

participants' ability to identify with stigmatized individuals. Even with the outlier of identification with characters in *Jersey Shore* the experience-taking aspect of this study was a success.

Experience-taking research going forward can potentially be used in different ways to explore how identifying with characters can affect viewer attitudes. One example of how experience-taking may be used is to investigate how experience-taking could potentially affect the success of product placement. Product placement has been shown to affect both implicit and explicit responses to placed brands (Gibson, Redker, & Zimmerman, 2014; Redker, Gibson, & Zimmerman, 2013). It's possible that higher levels of experience-taking could cause viewers to be more likely to identify with products used by characters in the show. In general, applying the experience taking construct could be an important contribution to many different areas of research.

The results of analyses of the NPI subscales also provides some support for my hypotheses. Two main aspects of narcissism are vanity and exploitation. When looking at how these scores were affected I found results supportive of my basic hypothesis. Participants who watched a narcissistic show had significantly higher vanity scores especially when participants were in the positive identification condition. This is important because characters in narcissistic reality shows are often seen as being vane to a fault. Participants in this study who watched a narcissistic show and especially when they were in the identification condition had significantly higher scores on the exploitative sub scale of the NPI as well. These results shows that participants are taking on a major aspect of the personality of these characters. It is also shows participants are taking on an aspect that is often deemed undesirable.

Media plays a big role in modern society, and reality TV is becoming a bigger part of that media. Despite this bigger role, little is known about how reality TV affects viewers. This study sheds some light on a potential consequence of reality TV exposure: increased narcissism. Given the wide variety of negative consequences of narcissism, it would be difficult to support that idea that such shows are really just “harmless entertainment.”

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NPI-40

Read each pair of statements and then choose the one that is closer to your own feelings and beliefs. Indicate your answer by circling the letter "A" or "B" to the left of each item. Please do not skip any items.

1. A I have a natural talent for influencing people.
 B I am not good at influencing people.
2. A Modesty doesn't become me.
 B I am essentially a modest person.
3. A I would do almost anything on a dare.
 B I tend to be a fairly cautious person.
4. A When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed.
 B I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so.
5. A The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.
 B If I ruled the world it would be a much better place.
6. A I can usually talk my way out of anything.
 B I try to accept the consequences of my behavior.
7. A I prefer to blend in with the crowd.
 B I like to be the center of attention.
8. A I will be a success.
 B I am not too concerned about success.
9. A I am no better or no worse than most people.
 B I think I am a special person.
10. A I am not sure if I would make a good leader.
 B I see myself as a good leader.

11. A I am assertive.
B I wish I were more assertive.
12. A I like having authority over people.
B I don't mind following orders.
13. A I find it easy to manipulate people.
B I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people.
14. A I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.
B I usually get the respect that I deserve.
15. A I don't particularly like to show off my body.
B I like to display my body.
16. A I can read people like a book.
B People are sometimes hard to understand.
17. A If I feel competent I am willing to take responsibility for making decisions.
B I like to take responsibility for making decisions.
18. A I just want to be reasonably happy.
B I want to amount to something in the eyes of the world.
19. A My body is nothing special.
B I like to look at my body.
20. A I try not to be a show off.
B I am apt to show off if I get the chance.
21. A I always know what I am doing.
B Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing.
22. A I sometimes depend on people to get things done.
B I rarely depend on anyone else to get things done.
23. A Sometimes I tell good stories.

- B Everybody likes to hear my stories.
24. A I expect a great deal from other people.
B I like to do things for other people.
25. A I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.
B I take my satisfactions as they come.
26. A Compliments embarrass me.
B I like to be complimented.
27. A I have a strong will to power.
B Power for its own sake doesn't interest me.
28. A I don't very much care about new fads and fashions.
B I like to start new fads and fashions.
29. A I like to look at myself in the mirror.
B I am not particularly interested in looking at myself in the mirror.
30. A I really like to be the center of attention.
B It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention.
31. A I can live my life in any way I want to.
B People can't always live their lives in terms of what they want.
32. A Being an authority doesn't mean that much to me.
B People always seem to recognize my authority.
33. A I would prefer to be a leader.
B It makes little difference to me whether I am a leader or not.
34. A I am going to be a great person.
B I hope I am going to be successful.
35. A People sometimes believe what I tell them.
B I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.

36. A I am a born leader.
B Leadership is a quality that takes a long time to develop.
37. A I wish somebody would someday write my biography.
B I don't like people to pry into my life for any reason.
38. A I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.
B I don't mind blending into the crowd when I go out in public.
39. A I am more capable than other people.
B There is a lot that I can learn from other people.
40. A I am much like everybody else.
B I am an extraordinary person.

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT DISTANCING YOURSELF FROM CHARACTERS IN A TV SHOW LEADS TO INCREASED ENJOYMENT

Cambridge, Mass. (AP) Do you believe that distancing yourself from a character in a TV show will increase your enjoyment? According to the results of a study published this week in *Science*, you could not be more right.

This study confirms a long history of research on the effectiveness of increasing enjoyment while watching TV. The study was conducted by Dr. Elias Boran, a psychological researcher at Harvard University. Boran says that his results provide direct confirmation of the idea that separating yourself from characters in TV shows can increase the viewer's enjoyment.

The findings are the results of a 2-year study involving 1,000 university students living in the university's residence halls. Participants in the study were randomly divided into one of two groups. One group attempted to relate or identify with characters in a TV show that they watched. The other group distanced themselves or did not identify with characters in a TV show. Boran found that students who distanced themselves from the characters reported feeling much more enjoyment while watching the show and also reported higher overall levels of happiness.

Boran says that his study is consistent with the results of scores of studies showing that people can effectively increase their enjoyment by detaching themselves from characters in the TV show they are watching. According to Boran "If you would like to maximize you enjoyment while watching TV, distancing yourself from the characters is the most effective way."

Research Shows That Relating to Characters In a TV show Leads to Increased Enjoyment

Cambridge, Mass. (AP) Do you believe that relating to character in a TV show will increase your enjoyment? According to the results of a study published this week in *Science*, you could not be more right.

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watched. The other group distanced themselves or did not identify with characters in a TV show. Boran found that students who related or identified with characters reported feeling much more enjoyment while watching the show and also reported higher overall levels of happiness.

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