



Are Reality TV Shows associated with Narcissism, Envy and Consumerism?

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Introduction

Current research regarding reality television and narcissism has focused on the reality television personality. Young and Drew (2006) found that of all celebrities, reality television personalities had the highest NPI (narcissism) scores. However, the influence of these shows on their audience has not yet been examined empirically. In this study, we examined the association between watching reality television shows, narcissism, envy, and consumerism. Specifically, we predicted that watching reality television would be associated with envy and consumerism, but that the personality trait of narcissism would mediate these associations.

Method

Target Population: Individuals who were 18 years and older

Recruitment: Web sites (e.g., Craigslist.org) and university students who received extra credit for their participation

Online survey:

- Narcissism (Narcissistic Personality Inventory [NPI]; Raskin & Terry, 1988)
- Questions to assess Reality television viewership (e.g., “Do you watch Reality TV? How many hours do you spend watching Reality TV per day? What Reality TV shows do you watch?”) written by the researchers
- Envy Assessment (written by the researchers)
- Consumerism Assessment (written by the researchers)
- Demographic characteristics

Participants

- 884 women, 155 men
- Mean age = 25 years (SD = 8.14 yrs.; Range = 18 – 67 yrs.)
- 45% Hispanic American/Latino, 38% European American /White, 11% African American/Black, 8% Asian American/Pacific Islander
- 91% Heterosexual
- 77% Christian
- Living in regions across the U.S.

Results

Does narcissism mediate the association between watching reality television and envy and consumerism?

Predictor: Watching Reality TV	B	SE B	β
Outcome:			
- Envy	-2.600	1.514	-.059 [†]
- Consumerism	4.267	.709	.200**
Predictor: NPI Scores			
Outcome:			
- Watching Reality TV	-.662	.419	-.048
- Envy	-.037	.114	-.012
- Consumerism	.378	.051	.242**
Predictor (w/ NPI as mediator): Watching Reality TV			
Outcome:			
- Envy	-1.881	1.536	-.043
- Consumerism	3.862	.698	.181**
Predictor: ‘Day in the Life of’ Reality TV category			
Outcome: Consumerism	3.839	.689	.195**

** $p < 0.01$, [†] $p < 0.10$

Figure 1.

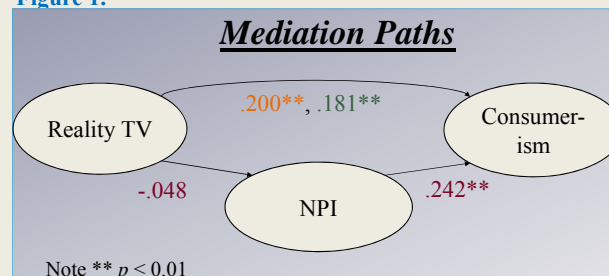
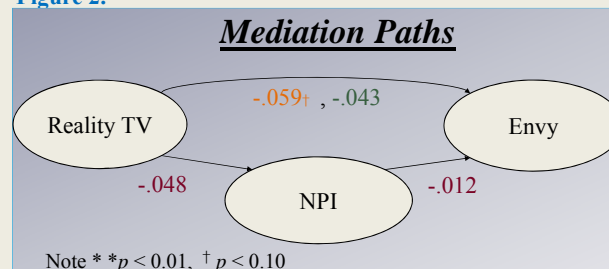


Figure 2.



Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, past research has focused on the reality television stars, but not the individuals watching these shows. Here, we examined the association between watching reality television, narcissism, envy, and consumerism. We found watching reality television to be positively and significantly associated with consumerism, and moderately associated with envy. We also proposed that narcissism would serve as a mediator between watching reality television and envy and consumerism. Here, we found narcissism served as a mediator only for the association between reality television and envy, not consumerism. This may be explained, as Hyeeseung and Beth (2010) suggest, by the fact that heavy television viewing [alone] may be associated with materialism. In light of that context, narcissism is not a necessary component to consumerism. Therefore, watching reality television served to predict consumerism, above and beyond the effects of narcissism.

Secondary analyses provided insight about the types of reality television programs that predict consumerism. We found that one particular category, above all others, positively and significantly associated with consumerism ($\beta = .195, p = .000$). We called this the ‘Day in the life of’ category where camera crews followed the daily life of a particular individual or individuals. The category includes shows such as “Keeping Up with the Kardashians”, “Bad Girls Club”, “Kendra”, “The Jersey Shore”, “The Real World”, “The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills”, etc.

Future research should focus on the relationship between narcissism and the ‘Day in the life of’ category of reality television. Possibly, individuals who spend a lot of time watching these types of shows are more narcissistic than individuals watching other types of reality television, which may help explain consumerism. Also, by further examining this particular audience, researchers can gain insight about the influence of watching reality television on intrapersonal and dyadic outcomes.

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