Mediated Voyeurism and the Guilty Pleasure of Consuming Reality Television

LEMI BARUH
Department of Media and Visual Arts, Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey

Media commentators have frequently argued that the rising popularity of reality programs stems from the show’s ability to accommodate television viewers’ voyeuristic needs. However, extant literature provides inconsistent evidence regarding the relationship between voyeurism and consumption of reality programs. This article expands on work by Baruh (2009) showing that voyeurism and social comparison tendency were positively associated with consumption of reality programming. After controlling for viewer demographics and hours of television viewing, multivariate analyses in this article indicate that there exists a positive relationship between voyeurism and consumption of reality programming, whereas social comparison tendency is no longer significantly related to reality programming consumption. Furthermore, bootstrap analysis indicates that the relationship between voyeurism and consumption of reality programs is mediated by a tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television. In contrast to consumption of reality programming, analyses indicate that trait voyeurism is negatively related to the consumption of fictional programming. On the other hand, social comparison and voyeuristic uses of television were found to be positively related to fictional programming consumption.

Since their penetration into the prime time schedules of television networks, the rising popularity of reality programs has frequently been attributed to their ability to appeal to television viewers’ voyeurism (Calvert, 2004; Peters, 2007). For example, in a recent article providing a critical analysis of reality television participants’ labor as demi-celebrities, Collins (2008) argued that reality programs “traffic in potentially embarrassing moments of intimacy...
... for the audiences' pleasurable voyeurism” (p. 100). Similarly, research on audiences’ opinions about reality programming suggests that television viewers themselves perceive reality programming to be voyeuristic (Hill, 2002, 2005) and concede that it is, at least partially, the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs that they are drawn to (Johnson-Woods, 2002).

Still, existing research on the relationship between voyeurism and the consumption of reality programs has exhibited inconclusive results. For example, in one of the first empirical investigations of the psychological appeal of reality programs, Nabi, Biely, Morgan, and Stitt (2003) found voyeurism to be a significant predictor of reality television consumption. However, findings from a later study suggested that although voyeuristic appeal might be a factor that distinguishes between fictional and reality programming, voyeurism was not a consistent predictor of the enjoyment of reality programs (Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006). Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) reached a similar conclusion and reported that only a small subset of television viewers watch reality programming to fulfill their voyeuristic needs.

Such inconsistencies in the findings with respect to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs may, at least partly, be due to a lack of an agreed upon conceptualization and, hence, operationalization of voyeurism as a common psychological orientation. A related component of the conceptual disagreement regarding the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs pertains to the difficulty of separating common voyeurism as a scopophilic interest from social curiosity (i.e., the drive to learn about others). As such, many of the existing studies on voyeurism and consumption of reality programming tend to use voyeurism and curiosity interchangeably. One such form of social curiosity that has already received some attention in recent studies regarding consumption of reality television is social comparison (i.e., seeking and using social information about others to evaluate oneself). However, such studies have been limited in their scope, mostly focusing on the tendency to engage in downward comparison as a potential predictor of reality television exposure (e.g., Nabi et al., 2003).

In a recent article investigating content features that may contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programming, Baruh (2009) introduced a scale of voyeurism and reported that, on a bivariate level, both voyeurism and social comparison tendency were significantly related to consumption of reality programming. Using data reported in Baruh along with previously unreported data, the current article seeks to expand the findings from this earlier study by developing a model of reality programming consumption that explains the relationship between voyeurism and consumption of reality programming. After providing a brief overview of the concept of voyeurism and its connection to the appeal of reality programming, this article develops a multivariate model of reality programming consumption that identifies the tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television as a mediator between
voyeurism and consumption of reality programming. Finally, this article con-
siders how reality programming differs from fictional programming in terms
of its appeal to television viewers by investigating voyeurism, voyeururistic uses
of television, and social comparison as potential predictors of consumption
of fictional programming.

VOYEURISM, COMPARATIVE CURIOSITY, AND THE
“CURTAINS-LEFT-SLIGHTLY-OPEN” APPEAL OF
REALITY PROGRAMS

In the psychiatric literature, voyeurism, as a pathological illness, has been
defined as an exaggerated tendency to enjoy observing, stealthily, the erot-
ically preferred gender while he or she is naked, undressing, and engaging
in sexual behavior (Freund, Watson, & Rienzo, 1988; Metzl, 2004; Posner
& Silbaugh, 1996). This definition underlines two dimensions of voyeurism
that reality programs may not be able to satisfy. The first of these is the
notion that the voyeur enjoys a *stealth* activity of observing the subject.
Accordingly, covert observation helps the voyeur hold power surreptitiously
over the target by enabling him to engage in a one-sided flow of information
because the subject of the gaze is not aware that he or she is being observed
(Calvert & Brown, 2000; Kuhn, 1995; MacNamara & Sagarin, 1977). Then, an
important problem with the assumed voyeuristic appeal of reality programs
stems from the fact that the targets of the observation—the participants of
reality programs—are aware of and often complicit in this viewing process
(Nabi et al., 2003; White, 2003). Second, reality programs usually cannot
fully accommodate the sexual dimensions of individuals’ voyeuristic desires.
Certainly, in terms of sexually suggestive content, reality programs offer their
audiences a taste of what it would have been like if it were not for the social
conventions and broadcasting regulations about obscenity (Breyer, 2004;
McGrath, 2004). However, despite some noteworthy examples to sexually
suggestive content, reality programs are not overly sexual when compared
to other television genres (Corner, 2002; Hill, 2002; Nabi et al., 2003; Patkin,
2003).

On the other hand, commenting on voyeurism and contemporary cul-
ture, several scholars have suggested that voyeurism does not necessarily
involve sexuality (Calvert, 2000; Chandler & Griffiths, 2004; Dovey, 2000).
According to this conceptualization of voyeurism, which borrows heavily
from Lacan and Miller’s (1998) argument that what the voyeurs seek is what
they cannot otherwise see, rather than being a psychopathological condition,
voyeurism is a common personal trait enjoyed by all “normal” individuals
to different degrees (Metzl, 2004). Foremost characterized by the pleasure
derived from seeing what one is not supposed to see, this form of voyeurism
(henceforth called *trait voyeurism*) diverges from pathological voyeurism in
that the common voyeur will seek sanctioned and less risky means through which the desire to take a peek at what should normatively not be accessible can be satisfied. Likewise, rather than compulsively seeking opportunities to satisfy his or her voyeurism, the common voyeur is opportunistic, acting when sources of private moments, expressions or information becomes readily available for easy and safe consumption (Mann, Ainsworth, Al-Attar & Davies, 2008; Sullivan, 2008). The present investigation focuses on this more common form of voyeurism.

In this respect, partly as a result of their ability to show the “informal and personal back region” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 106), electronic media provide such safe and convenient opportunities for the common voyeur to satisfy his or her needs (Calvert, 2004). Arguably, new forms of electronically mediated communications, such as Webcams or blogs, provide a safe haven within which the common voyeur—looking for safe ways to gaze—can meet the willing exhibitionist to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship of revealing and peeking (Dholakia & Zwick, 2001). Considered from this perspective, reality television’s branding as a privacy invasive genre that promises to deliver private and potentially embarrassing details about their participants may be an important component of its voyeuristic appeal to viewers.

Also, in reality television, the voyeuristic appeal of learning about the private details of others is supplemented by what can be called the “curtains left slightly open” appeal, which is closely related to the ongoing debates about the level of authenticity that can be achieved in reality programs. On the one hand, evidence suggests that television viewers targeted by reality programming report a preference for watching real events happening to real characters rather than watching scripted events (Gardyn, 2001; Hill, 2005; Jones, 2003; van Zoonen, 2001). On the other hand, despite such expectations of authenticity, most reality programming viewers are highly aware of the contrived nature of reality programs (Hill, 2002). Elaborating on how the blurred lines between authenticity and artificiality may actually motivate individuals to watch reality programs, Jones (2003) claims that the manufactured nature of reality programming may “liberate the content by calling attention to itself and allowing the internal dynamics to work themselves out in a more natural fashion” (p. 410). Accordingly, despite their artificiality, reality shows are not designed to make participants deny their true selves but to test and to reveal themselves through their interactions (Scannel, 2002). In many ways, then, reality programs, like other successful games, are based on ambiguity.

The curtains-left-slightly-open concept underlines the possibility that the ambiguity ensuing from the partial inaccessibility of the “authentic” may invite voyeuristic enjoyment. Just as it would be less exciting to watch one’s neighbors when their curtains are wide open and information is easily available, watching a reality program where every action and statement is taken on its face value would be much less enticing. In other words, just as voyeurs
would enjoy the few moments where the non-visible becomes visible (when, e.g., looking through a keyhole), viewers of reality programming will be willing to wait for those few moments when they can scrutinize the tiny bits of information that reveal participants’ true selves. And, just like a patient voyeur who is keen on completing the picture by constantly peeking at his or her target, the more one watches a reality program, the more clues one can collect about the “real” personality of a participant. As such, the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs would be due to both their ability to depict private and embarrassing moments and their potential to invite viewers to engage in careful scrutiny of participants’ behavior to identify glimpses of “authentic” scattered in between the “contrived.”

Until recently, evidence regarding the relationship between trait voyeurism and consumption of reality programming has been inconclusive. Part of the problem pertains to the inconsistencies regarding the manner in which voyeurism has been measured. For example, in a study of the psychological appeal of reality programming, rather than treating voyeurism as a psychological orientation, Nabi et al. (2006) utilized a set of variables that mix beliefs about the extent to which reality programs accommodate voyeurism (e.g. “when I watch that show, I feel like I am getting a peek into other people’s lives”) with items measuring the enjoyment of voyeuristic components of reality television (e.g. “I like seeing the private moments of the people on the show”). Likewise, in a recent article, Papacharissi and Mendelson’s (2007) conclusions regarding the relationship between voyeurism and the consumption of reality television are based on a set of variables that combine opinions about the sexual appeal of reality programming with reported attraction to participants.

Another part of the problem for research relating voyeurism to the consumption of reality programming stems from questions regarding the extent to which reality programs can be classified as voyeuristic. As discussed above, several researchers point out that reality programs lack many of the characteristics that would appeal to a typical voyeur (e.g., Corner, 2002; Hill, 2005; Nabi et al., 2006). As such, rather than voyeurism, the people-watching behavior that is associated with reality television may simply be due to a drive to learn about other people. One construct that may particularly explain this common curiosity about others is social comparison. In as early as 1954, Festinger argued that individuals feel a universal need to evaluate and improve themselves. According to Festinger’s social comparison theory, individuals often evaluate themselves by engaging in social comparisons with other people (Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977).

Although the primary motivation in social comparison is the evaluation of oneself, and despite reported variations in the types of social comparison that individuals engage in (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Taylor, Wayment, & Carillo, 1995; Wood, 1989), an important component of social comparison
is careful observation of and learning about other individuals (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Commenting on the nature of the observation that people engage in while making social comparisons, Goethals and Darley (1977) argue that “what is evaluated through social comparison are dispositions that cannot be observed directly but instead inferred” (p. 260). As such, they explain that social comparison may often require effortful observation oriented toward the interpretation of manifest behavior. It is this nature of the process of social comparison that makes it conceptually similar to voyeurism and operationally relevant to the consumption of reality programming; that is, an important part of the curtains-left-slightly-open appeal of reality programming—the careful scrutiny of a partially presented collage of personal information to make inferences about the participant—is related to individuals’ desire to seek information about others in order to evaluate themselves through social comparison.

In a recent article that utilized a combination of content analysis and survey methodology to investigate programming features that may potentially increase the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs, Baruh (2009) found that, on a bivariate level, trait voyeurism and social comparison were positively correlated with consumption of reality programming and that, after controlling for each other, both trait voyeurism and social comparison tendency continued to be positively associated with watching reality television. Given these findings, one of the purposes of this current article is to test whether the bivariate relationships between voyeurism, social comparison, and exposure to reality television persist at a multivariate level, particularly after controlling for key viewer demographics and amount of television viewing. Moreover, given the aforementioned disagreements in extant literature regarding the respective roles voyeurism and curiosity play in predicting consumption of reality programming, an important task at hand is to develop a model that better explains the path from a relatively stable psychological trait such as common voyeurism, which may be satisfied through various means, to reality programming. Of particular interest is the tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television as a potential mediator between trait voyeurism and consumption of reality programming.

VOYEURISTIC USES OF TELEVISION AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN VOYEURISM AND REALITY TV CONSUMPTION

In line with the uses and gratifications approach to studying media audiences, an underlying assumption of the proposition that common trait voyeurism will be positively related to consumption of reality programming is that television viewers will actively seek content to satisfy their voyeuristic needs.
A central tenet of the uses and gratifications approach is that audience activity is considered to be purposive and goal oriented (Fiske, 1990; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Lull, 1980; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Accordingly, media selection processes are oriented toward the satisfaction of social, psychological, and biological needs. Moreover, media may provide the natural solution to such needs (e.g., by providing information) or substitute for a missing, more natural solution (e.g., engaging in social interaction; McQuail & Gurevitch, 1974). In this respect, common voyeurism can be considered as a relatively stable personality trait, which can be satisfied through various mediated forms (e.g., reality television, voyeur cams) as well as unmediated forms (e.g., eavesdropping on a private conversation between two people). If so, an individual who exhibits a higher tendency for common voyeurism should be motivated to search for voyeuristic content in media (voyeuristic uses of media), which, in turn, should lead to higher consumption of reality television.

At this point, it is important to note that, as with the conceptualization of voyeurism, the tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television has been conceptualized either as sexual arousal that viewers derive from media consumption (e.g., Bantz, 1982; henceforth called sexually motivated uses of television) or as the tendency to use media to observe behavior that would typically be hidden, inaccessible, or private (see discussion in Nabi et al., 2003; henceforth called voyeuristic uses of television). To the extent that trait voyeurism is defined as a common tendency characterized by opportunistic enjoyment of having access to private moments—including but not necessarily limited to sexual moments—it can be expected that it will be positively associated with both sexually motivated uses of television and voyeuristic uses of television.

H1a: Trait voyeurism will be positively associated with tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television.
H1b: Trait voyeurism will be positively associated with tendency to engage in sexually motivated uses of television.

On the other hand, as discussed previously, the broadcasting landscape within which the genre of reality programming exists has long been subject to obscenity regulations, especially in the United States, (e.g., Roth v. United States, 1957). As such the voyeuristic appeal of reality programming may more likely be due to its ability to depict private moments rather than providing sexually appealing content. If so, and given this article's conceptualization of voyeurism as interest in “back region” behavior, it should be expected that the relationship between trait voyeurism and reality programming consumption will be mediated by voyeuristic uses of television and not by sexually motivated uses of television.
H2a: Tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television will be positively associated with consumption of reality television.
H2b: Tendency to engage in sexually motivated uses of television content will not be significantly related to consumption of reality programming.
H2c: Tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television will mediate the relationship between voyeurism and reality television consumption.

VOYEURISM AND CONSUMPTION OF FICTIONAL PROGRAMMING

Whereas the results from previous research point to the possibility that voyeurism and consumption of reality programming will be positively related to each other, another important question that needs to be addressed is whether reality programs are distinct from other genres in terms of their relationship with voyeurism. At this point, it is important to point out that the taste for peeking into other people’s lives, and using mediated experience to satisfy this drive, may have existed since long before the rise of reality programs. For instance, Denzin (1995) argues that, starting with the early 1900s, contemporary society witnessed the birth of the cinematic gaze. This gaze was voyeuristic primarily because of the characteristics of the physical location where the audiences were situated: a darkened theater where the audiences would be able to break the norms of “civil inattention” (Goffman, 1963) without being the target of reciprocal gazing. Similarly, according to fiction writer David Foster Wallace (1993), television fictions involve an “orgy of illusions” for the pseudo-spies (p. 153), illusions such as the belief that what viewers see are people in real situations whose moments are being stolen by them. On the other hand, as has been noted by several scholars (Brenton & Cohen, 2003; Murray, 2004), unlike actors in fiction, the participants of reality programs are perceived to be coming from the ranks of the people that they represent. As Andrejevic (2009) explains, in reality programs, voyeuristic pleasure of gazing and “that of self-display … are intertwined” (p. 325). When combined with the curtains left slightly open appeal of reality programming described above, these unique characteristics of reality programming may set it apart from other genres, especially fictional programming, in terms of their voyeuristic appeal. As such, the final question that this study will address pertains to whether voyeurism will predict consumption of fictional programming.

RQ1: Is trait voyeurism related to consumption of fictional television programming?
METHOD

Survey Development and Procedures

The survey was developed after a detailed review of existing survey instruments on media consumption and voyeurism. Two pilot tests administered to undergraduate students ($N = 35$ and $N = 40$) and a discussion group held with 10 graduate students assisted the development of the items that were unique to this study. Following the pretests, the survey was administered online to a panel of adult, opt-in participants (obtained from Zoomerang Sample), who resided in the United States and had previously volunteered to take online surveys in exchange for financial incentives. The panel in question contains two million respondents who were prescreened and profiled against a key set of sociodemographic variables (such as income), enabling researchers to reach specific target groups. In the current project, an e-mail invitation for the survey was sent by Zoomerang to a general sample of panelists whose key sociodemographic characteristics corresponded (to some degree) with that of the general U.S. population. In the invitation, the study was introduced as a research project about television programming choices. Participants were informed that they would answer a number of questions related to their opinions about television programming including dramas, news programs, soap operas, talk shows, and reality-based programming and their assessment of some ideas about the social world. The response rate for this survey was 16% with 550 respondents completing the survey.

Participants

Overall, the mean age for the respondents was 47 ($SD = 16.39$), and slightly more than one half of the respondents were female (55%). Close to one fifth of the respondents had a high school degree (19%), 32% had some college experience, 29% had a college degree, and 14% had a graduate degree. A majority of the respondents were married (54%), followed by “never been married” (20%), and divorced (10%). A large majority of the respondents were White (86%), followed by African Americans (6%). More than one half of the respondents categorized themselves as either Catholic or Protestant (54%). In terms of political orientation, 36% categorized themselves as Democrat, 31% categorized themselves as Republican, and 26% classified themselves as Independent.

Measures

In addition to the demographic measures just mentioned (age, education, gender, race, and political identification), the survey instrument focused on six sets of variables: television viewing, television programming choice
(including reality programs and programs from other television genres),
trait voyeurism, voyeuristic uses of television, sexually motivated uses of
television, and social comparison tendency. (The data associated with three
of these variables—reality programming consumption, trait voyeurism, and
social comparison tendency—were previously reported in Baruh, 2009). With
respect to television viewing in general, the survey asked the participants to
give an estimate of the time they spend viewing television during (a) week-
days, (b) weeknights, (c) weekend days, and (d) weekend nights. The me-
dian for television viewing was between three to four hours per day during
weekdays and four to five hours per day during weekends.

Television programming choice (both reality television and other gen-
res) was measured with a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (more
than once a week) indicating the frequency with which the participants
watched 28 programs that aired on major U.S. networks between June 2005
and December 2005. Of the 28 programs listed in the survey, 15 were classi-
fied as reality programs, and 13 were classified as non-reality programming.
The reality programs were randomly selected from a list of 29 prime time
reality programs airing at that time on major national broadcast networks in
the United States (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, UPN, and WB—before the formation
of CW network). The reality programs (with the percentage of respondents
who indicate that they watch at least once a week) included: Survivor (17%),
Extreme Makeover Home Edition (16%), Cops (15%), The Apprentice (13%),
America’s Most Wanted (12%), Dancing with the Stars (11%), Amazing Race
(11%), Big Brother (9%), The Biggest Loser (9%), Nanny 911 (7%), Average Joe
(6%), America’s Next Top Model (6%), Three Wishes (6%), Tommy Lee Goes to
College (4%), and Beauty and the Geek (4%). Using these 15 reality programs,
a summative index (henceforth called exposure to reality television) was
created. The index had a mean score of 13.5 (SD = 12.4) and an interquar-
tile range of 16. (For a more detailed discussion of this measure and its
development see Baruh, 2009). The non-reality programs included television
dramas, situation comedies, daytime talk shows, magazine programs, soap
operas, and news programs. Seven of these programs were aggregated to
create a summative index of exposure to fictional programming: Desperate
Housewives, CSI, Grey’s Anatomy, Arrested Development, Without a Trace,
Young and the Restless, and Days of Our Lives. The index had a mean score
of 6.51 (SD = 5.4), with an interquartile range of 8.

The participants were also asked to complete an 8-item trait voyeurism
scale. The items that formed the scale treated voyeurism as a psychological
trait related to one’s willingness to continue watching/listening/reading when
an opportunity to have access to what is usually not accessible presents itself.
The questions provided the respondents with hypothetical situations within
which they would accidentally come across opportunities to have a peek
at the lives of others and asked them to indicate how they would react
(from 1 = immediately stop looking/listening/reading to 7 = try to see/hear/
read all they could). For example, one item asked the respondents whether they would take a peek if they were to notice that instead of their own photographs, the photo lab gave them a set of pictures showing a couple skinnydipping, and another question asked if they would continue reading a message after realizing that the message was not intended for them. The eight trait voyeurism items formed a highly reliable scale ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 22.39$, $SD = 11.16$) ranging from 5 to 56. (For a more detailed discussion of this measure and its development see Baruh, 2009).

In addition to trait voyeurism, the survey also included a 3-item scale (with response options ranging between 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) utilized to measure motivation to use television for voyeuristic purposes. The scale was created using slightly revised versions of items from the voyeurism measure used by Nabi et al. (2006). Table 1 contains the wording and descriptive summaries of the items and the resulting scale ($\alpha = .85$). A similar two-item scale (listed on Table 1) was used to measure respondents’ tendency to engage in sexually motivated uses of television content ($r = .85$, $M = 6.63$, $SD = 3.61$).

Finally, due to concerns with survey length, a partial scale was utilized for the measurement of social comparison. The scale was created using the three items with the highest factor loadings from Gibbons and Buunk’s (1999) 11-item social comparison scale (see Table 1). The reliability of the scale was at an acceptable level ($\alpha = .72$) and the mean score of the scale was 12.65 ($SD = 3.87$).

### TABLE 1 Descriptive Summaries

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trait Voyeurism Scale</strong></td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Voyeuristic Uses of Television Scale</strong></td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy watching television programs that help me get a peek into people’s private moments.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like television programs that show a side of people that I would not normally see.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy watching television programs that provide access to things that people try to hide.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexually Motivated Uses of Television</strong></td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like programs that are sexually arousing</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy watching television programs that are sexually appealing</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Comparison Scale</strong></td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>I pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared to how others do things.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>I often compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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</table>
RESULTS

Voyeurism, Voyeuristic Uses of Television, and Reality Television Viewership

The predictions of the first set of hypotheses, that trait voyeurism would be positively related to voyeuristic uses of television (Hypothesis 1a) and sexually motivated uses of television content (Hypothesis 1b), were confirmed by partial correlations controlling for demographics, television viewing, and social comparison tendency. Accordingly, trait voyeurism was positively correlated with both voyeuristic uses of television ($r = .34, p < .001$) and sexually motivated uses of television content ($r = .48, p < .001$).

Table 2 summarizes the multivariate regression model predicting consumption of reality programs. The model served for several purposes. First, it was used to determine whether the bivariate relationships of both trait voyeurism and social comparison with exposure to reality programming observed by Baruh (2009) persist after controlling for viewer demographics and amount of television viewing. Second, it was used to examine voyeuristic uses of television (Hypothesis 2a) and sexually motivated uses of television (Hypothesis 2b) as predictors of reality programming consumption (and, thus, as potential mediators between trait voyeurism and reality program consumption). The model was checked for the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. When needed, nonlinear transformations of the variables were conducted and reported.

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Block 2</th>
<th>Block 3</th>
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<td>14.86***</td>
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<td>1.13</td>
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<td>Political Id. (Indep.)</td>
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<td>-0.18</td>
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<td>0.16***</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<td>0.07†</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>(Voyeuristic uses of TV)²</td>
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<td>0.31*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually motivated uses of TV</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Δ$R^2$ 0.18*** 0.03*** 0.09***

Note. $N = 545$, †$p < .1$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$ (2-tailed).
The first block of the regression contains demographic characteristics (age, education, gender, race, and political identification) and hours of television viewing that were included in the model as control variables. Among the control variables, race and education were not significant predictors of exposure to reality programs. Younger respondents were more likely to have higher exposure to reality programs, potentially signaling a generational difference with respect to reality television watching behavior ($\beta = -.27, p < .001$). The mean exposure score for females was 3.16 points higher than that of males ($p < .01$). Not surprisingly, hours of television viewing was positively related to reality television exposure scores ($\beta = .27, p < .001$). This first block explained 17.8% of the variance in exposure to reality television ($p < .001$).

In the second block, trait voyeurism and social comparison were added to determine if trait voyeurism and social comparison would predict exposure to reality programming after accounting for the influence of viewer demographics. The findings show that whereas trait voyeurism was a positive predictor of exposure to reality programming ($\beta = .16, p < .001$), social comparison was not significantly related to consumption of reality programming ($\beta = .07, ns$). The second block explained an additional 2.9% of the variance in the model ($p < .001$).

In the third block, voyeuristic uses of television and sexually motivated uses of television content were added to the model to test Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 2b. As mentioned above, routine checks for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were carried out for each block of the model. Although there was no significant deviation from linearity for the relationship between exposure to reality programming and demographic variables, hours of television viewing, trait voyeurism, social comparison, or sexually motivated uses of television, the relationship between voyeuristic uses of television and exposure to reality programming significantly deviated from linearity. Using the loess function to see the shape of the fit curve between voyeuristic uses of television and exposure to reality programs revealed that the deviation from linearity was in quadratic form. Hence, in the third block of the regression model, a quadratic transformation of voyeuristic uses of television was used. As predicted by Hypothesis 2a, voyeuristic uses of television was positively associated with the consumption of reality programs. The shape of the fit curve shows that, for the whole range of possible values of voyeuristic uses of television (from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 21), the positive relationship between voyeuristic uses of television and exposure to reality programs got stronger as the tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television increased ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). On the other hand, as predicted by Hypothesis 2b, sexually motivated uses of television was not significantly related to reality television consumption ($\beta = .03, ns$). With the addition of voyeuristic uses of television and sexually motivated uses of television to the model, the percentage of variance in reality television exposure explained by the model increased by 8.9% ($p < .001$).
Last, Hypothesis 2c predicted that the relationship between trait voyeurism and consumption of reality programming would be mediated by voyeuristic uses of television. To test this hypothesis, the bootstrap approach (Bollen & Stine, 1990; Preacher & Hayes, 2008)—a nonparametric method that repeatedly samples from the data to estimate indirect effects—was used. This procedure was run using an SPSS script developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). In line with Hypothesis 2c, the results from the test show that complete mediation has occurred with the inclusion of voyeuristic uses of television into the model. The results of the mediation analyses (1,000 bootstrap samples) showed that trait voyeurism was positively and significantly associated with reality television exposure ($B = .22, p < .001$) and also to voyeuristic uses of television ($B = .17, p < .001$). With respect to the effects of the mediators on reality television exposure, analyses showed that voyeuristic uses of television was positively and significantly related to reality television exposure ($B = .95, p < .001$). Subsequent analyses demonstrated that voyeuristic uses of television mediated the relation between trait voyeurism and symptoms of reality television exposure. The bootstrap results indicated that the direct effect of trait voyeurism on reality television exposure was no longer significant when voyeuristic uses of television was included in the model ($B = .06, ns$). Furthermore, the analyses revealed, with a 95% confidence interval, that the total indirect effect of trait voyeurism on reality television was significant, with a point estimate of .17 and a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of .12 to .22. Thus, voyeuristic uses of television fully mediated the association between trait voyeurism on reality television. The model explained 19.5% of the variation in consumption of reality programming.

Voyeurism and Consumption of Fictional Drama

The findings presented above support the hypotheses that television viewers’ voyeuristic orientations factor into their consumption of reality programs. However, an important question raised earlier in this article pertains to whether a similar relationship exists between trait voyeurism and “fictional” programs. In order to test this possibility bivariate and multivariate analyses of the relationships between trait voyeurism and exposure to fictional programming and between social comparison and exposure to fictional programming were conducted. On a bivariate level, social comparison was positively related to the consumption of fictional programs ($r = .09, p < .05$), but trait voyeurism had no relationship with the consumption of these fictional programs ($r = -.002, ns$).

Table 3 summarizes an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model predicting fictional programming exposure. This regression model replicates the OLS regression that predicted exposure to reality programs. For example, as with exposure to reality programs, the third block of the regression
TABLE 3 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Exposure to Fictional Programming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>Block 2</th>
<th>Block 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.84*</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (Non-White)</td>
<td>-1.91</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Id. (Democ.)</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Id. (Indep.)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television viewing</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait voyeurism</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social comparison</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voyeuristic uses of TV</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually motivated uses of TV</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>0.10***</td>
<td>0.01*</td>
<td>0.05***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 545, †p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (2-tailed).

Analysis shows that the number of hours of television a respondent watched (β = .22, p < .001) and their tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television (β = .19, p < .001) were positively related to the consumption of fictional programs.

On the other hand, there were some important differences between the model predicting exposure to reality programs and the model predicting exposure to fictional programs. First, in the second block of the regression (presented in Table 3), trait voyeurism, which was a significant predictor of exposure to reality programs, was not significantly related to the consumption of fictional programming. In fact, after controlling for voyeuristic uses of television in the third block of the regression, trait voyeurism was negatively associated with consumption of fictional programs (β = -.15, p < .01). Second, in the second block of the regression model, the tendency to engage in social comparison was a significant positive predictor of consumption of reality programming (β = .09, p < .05), unlike in the model predicting exposure to reality programming. Third, the tendency to engage in sexually motivated uses of television, which was not a significant predictor of reality television consumption, was positively associated with consumption of fictional programming (β = .18, p < .01).

DISCUSSION

Since becoming a staple of television programming, reality programs have often been linked with the rise of voyeurism in contemporary societies. How-
ever, current research on the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs exhibits inconclusive results, partly due to the lack of an agreed on conceptualization and operationalization of voyeurism. This article argued that one common form of voyeurism may predict consumption of reality programming. This form, referred to in this article as trait voyeurism, is characterized by the practice of seeking safe (and often reciprocal) ways of having access to information and/or experience that would be otherwise (and normatively) inaccessible, and something enjoyed opportunistically (rather than compulsively) by individuals. Baruh (2009) recently reported that both trait voyeurism and the tendency to engage in social comparison were related to consumption of reality programming. One of the main purposes of this study was to test whether the relationship of reality programming consumption with trait voyeurism and the tendency to engage in social comparison would persist after controlling for viewer demographics and hours of television viewing. The results from a multivariate regression summarized in this article indicate that of these two variables (trait voyeurism and social comparison tendency) only trait voyeurism had a significant relationship with consumption of reality programming after controlling for demographics and hours of television viewing.

In trying to outline the relationship between trait voyeurism and consumption of reality programs, this article also made an important distinction between voyeurism as a relatively stable psychological orientation and voyeurism’s manifestation as a motivation in media selection (i.e., voyeuristic uses of television). To the extent that voyeurism can be considered as a common tendency that exists among all individuals to different degrees, it is reasonable to expect that individuals will use various mediated and unmediated activities, including watching reality programs, to satisfy this need. Evidence in this article showing that voyeuristic uses of television mediates the relationship between trait voyeurism and the consumption of reality programs lends support to this claim by showing that individuals with higher trait voyeurism are likely to seek media content that satisfies this need, and that this in turn increases their consumption of reality programs. Notably, beyond showing the importance of distinguishing voyeurism from its manifestation in media use, this article also underlines the need to distinguish between voyeuristic uses of television, as defined in this article, and the tendency to enjoy sexually appealing content on television, which has been conflated in past research with voyeuristic uses of television (e.g., Bantz, 1982; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007).

It is also important to note that after controlling for viewer demographics, hours of television viewing, and social comparison tendency, there is no significant relationship between trait voyeurism and consumption of fictional programming. This finding suggests that “reality” may be a defining characteristic of television viewers’ programming choice when it comes to satisfying their voyeuristic needs.
Limitations

Like many other studies that employ survey methodology, an important limitation of the current study concerns the makeup of the survey sample. Unquestionably, with a response rate of less than 20% in a survey that used an opt-in online sample of respondents, it is very likely that the respondents were not representative of the general population. For example, Whites seem to be overrepresented in the survey (86% in this survey vs. the 77% in the 2008 General Social Surveys (GSS) data; National Data Program for the Sciences, 2008). Similarly, the survey overrepresented individuals with at least a bachelor’s degree (43% in this survey vs. 30% in the 2008 GSS data). On the other hand, the average age of the respondents of this survey is on par with results obtained from the 2008 GSS data (47); and in terms of amount of television viewing, the results from this survey (four to five hours of television viewed per day) reflects results from recent Nielsen reports (The Nielsen Company, 2009). At this point, it is also worth noting that there is very little reason to suspect that a potential bias caused by the sampling method or the low response rate would spur the observed relationships between trait voyeurism, voyeuristic uses of television and consumption of reality programming.

Another problem with cross-sectional survey designs is the lack of an ability to determine the direction of causality. This article argues that voyeurism is a psychological orientation that would influence the extent to which respondents consumed reality programs. On the other hand, as has been suggested in popular and academic accounts of reality television, it is certainly possible that watching reality programs influence the voyeuristic tendencies of television viewers. However, the finding that the relationship between trait voyeurism and the consumption of reality programs is mediated by a tendency to consume voyeuristic television programs makes it more plausible to assert that trait voyeurism influences how individuals use media in general (voyeuristic uses of television), which, in turn, influences the consumption of reality programs.

Contributions and Future Research

Despite the methodological issues discussed above, this article makes several important contributions. First, as mentioned above, the study provides strong evidence supporting the oft-repeated hypothesis regarding the voyeuristic appeal of reality programming. Considered from this perspective, this study also has a potential to further our understanding of audience behavior. For example, the findings pertaining to the relationship between voyeurism and consumption of reality programming provide an example of how relatively stable psychological tendencies may underlie media use motivations that are studied under the uses and gratifications paradigm. On the other hand, the
uses and gratifications paradigm itself has often been criticized for being too psychologically determinist and ignoring the social and cultural dimensions of audience interaction with media content (for a summary, see Ruddock, 2007).

As Black (2006) notes, there is a general need for a “form of psychological theorizing that can engage with the social and psychic or the social and psychological as interdependent processes” (p. 213). Admittedly, the cross-sectional methodology applied in this study lends itself to a largely psychological interpretation of motivations behind consumption of reality programming. However, informed by the extant theoretical discussions on the rise of voyeurism in contemporary culture (e.g., Calvert, 2000), the conceptualization, as well as the operationalization, of “common voyeurism” is an important step towards approaching audience behavior in a way that takes into consideration the interaction between cultural dynamics and psychological motivations. In this regard, it should also be noted that many other forms of media consumption, such as readership of tabloid newspapers, paparazzi magazines, or use of social media (both by creating profiles and perusing other individuals’ profiles), are indicative the growth of what Calvert (2000) names as “Voyeur Nation.” As such, findings described in this article have the potential to be useful not only with respect to understanding reality programming consumption, but also in studies that investigate different manifestations of “common” voyeurism in our society.

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