

Loneliness, Parasocial Interaction, and the Media: Tracing the Patterns of Understanding

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Abstract

This study examines a predominant trend in the literature regarding communication and media effects. The purpose of the current study is to examine the extent to which this pattern is identifiable in the communication and media literature that has focused on parasocial interaction and loneliness over the past 65 years. The central argument of this study is that this pattern may result in a field of research that is not growing at an optimal rate, and that the recognition of this problem is the first step towards its resolution. The argument advanced in this study relies upon a chronological review and thematic discussion of the parasocial interaction and loneliness literatures published between 1950 and 2015 in North America. Three central themes emerge through the review: ubiquitous contention, the application of repetitive arguments to newer media technologies, and the resilient camps of perspective.

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Introduction

As media effects research began to flourish in the mid-20th Century, several fields of investigation began to take shape. Much of this work, including the study of parasocial interaction and loneliness, developed in parallel streams of interrogation, deeply connected yet often separate. The history of media effects is frequently presented in accordance with a three-phased model (see, e.g., Schramm & Roberts, 1972; Katz, 1980; Berger & Chaffee 1987; Wicks, 1996; Power, Kubey, & Kioussis, 2002; and Keppinger, 2008). During the first phase – spanning roughly from 1900 to 1930s – media was imputed with the power to shape individuals' beliefs, reform their opinions, change their habits, and mould behaviour (McQuail, 1979). This view was linked, in part, to the rapid consumer uptake of cinema and radio technologies and their popular appeal in the press and other prevailing information outlets of the day (e.g., newspapers and radio). The second phase – spanning roughly from 1940 to 1960s – exemplified a shift away from hyperbole and speculation toward scepticism, with empirical methods being increasingly employed to answer a narrow range of questions pertaining to the effect of mass communication and its effectiveness as a means of influence (Katz, 1987). The third phase – spanning roughly from 1960s to the present – has been marked by an apparent shift from a small number of studies investigating a narrow range of questions to wider and more substantive knowledge, with theorists and researchers becoming better able to assess larger belief structures given their tendency to maintain more moderate expectations than their counterparts from the earlier phases (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011).

During the first phase of media effects research it often was assumed that media power was exploited by advertisers, newspaper proprietors, government propagandists, and state leaders. This was a period in which the social sciences were inchoate and the concepts and methods used to examine media power were not fully developed (McQuail, 1979). The dominant media effects

theory of the day was commonly referred to as the Hypodermic Needle Model. The needle analogy was, and continues to be, used to convey the notion that persuasive messages could be administered to their target with desired effects being immediately evident. This view complemented the notion of all-powerful propagandists (i.e., the government) being best positioned to manipulate a passive public and audience (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011).

By the 1940s the dominant perspective held that media effects were neither direct nor unmediated. The topics being studied at the time included: social modeling of observed representations of behaviour in the mass media (especially as it related to children), attitude change, political campaign effects and propaganda campaigns (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). In the political domain, research showed the media impact upon voters was limited, with few voters actually changing their views during the course of political campaign. Furthermore, audience motivation and prior beliefs were increasingly acknowledged as influencing voter behavior.

From the 1960s onward, media effects researchers focused increasingly on audience motivations for media consumption and developing typologies of media use. With the shift to motivation-centered research, investigators began to recognize that different cognitive or affective states facilitated the use of media for different reasons, with different media forms being deemed better or worse for gratifying specific needs of individuals (Ruggiero, 2000). For example, newspapers were found to be most gratifying for individuals who consider state and society to be important, books and television were found to be best at gratifying needs related to the self, and television was found to be gratifying for time wasting, but not necessarily escape (Katz & Haas, 1973).

The phenomenon of parasocial interaction was first identified during the second phase in the history of media effects research by Horton & Wohl's (1956) investigation of the imaginary

relationships that may develop between television personae and individual audience members. Their study was grounded in the observation that when speaking of, or meeting, a television celebrity, members of television viewing audiences often spoke of the portrayed characters as they would close acquaintances. Although the understanding of parasocial interaction has broadened since the 1950s, several of its defining characteristics have remained unchanged. For example, parasocial interaction continues to be defined as the illusory face-to-face interaction that occurs when media viewers interact with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Horton & Strauss, 1957; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Allen, 1988; Rafaeli, 1990; Nass & Sundar, 1994; Auter & Lane, 1999; Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Papa, Singhal, Law, Pant, & Sood, 2000; Ashe & McCutcheon, 2001; Giles, 2002; Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2004; Ballantine & Martin, 2005; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006; and Hartman & Goldhoorn, 2011).

Starting from the premise that mass media were purposefully targeting a marginalized portion of the American population who were lonely, Horton & Wohl hypothesized that television personalities were explicitly crafted to appeal to media consumers by taking on the characteristics of a companion (i.e., personae) precisely for the purposes of generating and maintaining an illusion of intimacy between performers and their audiences. This illusion, they posited, resulted in audience members listening to media personae as they would their friends. Describing this sense of intimacy as a media consumer's illusion of a face-to-face relationship with a performer/celebrity, Horton & Wohl characterized parasocial interaction as a one-sided, non-dialectical relationship controlled by the performer/celebrity that has no possibility of mutual development.

Parasocial relationships do not occur for everyone, and when they do, they occur with varying levels of intensity, from viewers observing personae as merely a source of entertainment

to viewers who become obsessed with personae and model their lives around them (Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2004). Parasocial interaction has been shown to not only make it more likely for media users to consume more television content—and thus more advertising content—but also to affect users on an emotional level more deeply than would be possible without the interaction (Giles, 2002). Media personae are able to become strong models for media users through parasocial interaction, and the positive feelings directed towards these personae can then be transferred onto the advertising messages being consumed (Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2004).

In order to consider the possibility that there is a connection between parasocial interaction and loneliness we must create the conditions by which the concept can gain traction in a more comprehensive way, which means that we must first acknowledge that loneliness cannot be defined in a vacuum. Loneliness must be defined in such a way that gives currency to it as a multidimensional concept that is open to interdisciplinary analysis. While we must certainly reference the psychological quality and engage with the relevant empirical data on the subject, it would be advantageous to understand loneliness as a psychological concept that gains its social currency through communication practices over time and therefore is evolving alongside those practices.

Although the concept of loneliness existed long before the concept of parasocial interaction, within the communication and psychology literatures the conceptualization of these two phenomena developed along similar timelines. During this period loneliness tended to be understood as a direct result of such things as experiencing remoteness and indifference in childhood relationships, shifts from small communities to large highly-mechanised cities; shifts in the function and structure of the family unit, increases in economic security, and lack of ‘proper’ relationships (Peplau, 1955; Greer, 1953). Definitions of loneliness initially fell into three major

camps. The first declared loneliness an emotion, the second viewed it as a cognitive or affective state, and the third claimed that loneliness is both a state and the emotion that is a result of that state (Greer, 1953). Nonetheless, throughout the 1950s consensus began to form around the notion that loneliness was directly linked to unfulfilled desires for communication with emotionally important others (Greer, 1953) as well as being an unbearable, inherently negative experience (Peplau, 1955).

The apparent ‘epidemic’ (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010 and Zysberg, 2015) of loneliness in the 21st Century has fuelled further examinations of the causes and effects of loneliness. Rokach (2002) identified relocation as a major environmental cause of loneliness, ultimately due to a detachment from an established social group. Huntington (2006) also identified cultural and political turmoil as an environmental cause of loneliness, citing evidence that the breakdown of social structure can promote uncertainty and leave people at greater risk of loneliness. Zysberg (2015) provided a deeper look at the role personality types play in determining future loneliness, suggesting that a larger sub-section of personality types he terms the lonely personality incorporates personalities that tend towards lower regulation of reactions and lower interpersonal relationship skills.

Examining the evolution of the relationship between parasocial interaction and loneliness offers a window through which some of the tendencies of the development of media effects research over time might be observed. The introduction of new media technologies often coincides with an explosion of research and commercial activity in a variety of communication and media-related fields of study. This is inevitably tied to both the glorifying of positive socio-cultural impacts the technology is ‘sure’ to bring, and laments for the destruction it is sure to lay in the wake of the technology. After a period of contentious and frenzied activity one tends to observe

a shift in understanding about the relationship between media technologies, and particular phenomena away from predominantly causal, or direct effects, orientations toward perspectives that view this relationship as multifaceted and too complex to allow for sweeping statements regarding media effects. The purpose of the current study is to examine the extent to which this pattern is identifiable in the communication and media literature that has focused parasocial interaction and loneliness over the past 65 years.

The argument advanced in this study relies upon a chronological review and subsequent thematic discussion of the parasocial interaction and loneliness literatures published between 1950 and 2015 in North America. Alderman (2014) defines a literature review as a means of surveying what research has been conducted on a particular topic, with a chronological review being sorted by publication date so as to highlight the changes and patterns in the research over time. The thematic discussion that follows, as described by Guest & MacQueen (2012), goes beyond counting phrases or words and emphasizes the implicit and explicit ideas within the data.

Several studies similar to the present one have successfully employed a similar research method. Giles (2002) performed a chronological review of the parasocial interaction literature and found that the concept had not been sufficiently developed at a theoretical level with regards to how it fits within the matrix of usual social activity, how it is impacted by different types of personae, and how a parasocial relationship develops over time. The review conducted by Giles has at the time of writing been cited by nearly 400 peer-reviewed articles and played a major role in the later development of Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes's parasocial contact hypothesis¹. Yzer & Southwell (2008) performed a chronological review of two streams of literature dealing with new

¹ The parasocial contact hypothesis posits that if people process parasocial interaction in a similar manner to interpersonal interaction, then the benefits of intergroup contact may also result from parasocial contact (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2007)

communication technologies, namely those regarding social isolation effects versus connection effects, and ideas about whether new technologies lead to group integration or polarization. Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard (2013) performed a chronological review of the literature on uses, effects, and gratifications of media during emerging adulthood and found that emerging adults spend more time using media than they spend doing any other activity, with certain types of media content influencing both positive and negative outcomes in emerging adulthood.

A chronological literature review is ideal for the current research as it facilitates the assessment of the current state of the research on parasocial interaction and loneliness while also emphasizing how the academic ideas have developed over time (Alderman, 2014). A thematic discussion also proves useful for the current research as it ensures flexibility in exploring the reviewed literature, allowing for emergent themes while remaining applicable to research that may go beyond the researcher's personal experience (Guest & MacQueen, 2012).

The research presented herein is divided into two primary sections. The first offers a chronological review, spanning from before the 1950s to 2015, of the parasocial interaction and loneliness literature, as well as the media effects literature relevant to these two concepts. The review is concluded with an outline of the emergent themes. The second section provides an interpretive discussion centered on the emergent themes and their relation to the hypothesized pattern examined herein. The paper concludes with a discussion of the three emergent themes—ubiquitous contention, the application of repetitive arguments to newer media technologies, and the existence and resilience of specific camps of perspective—and how they may be negatively impacting the field as a whole.

1. Literature Review

This discussion offers a chronological review of the literature published on parasocial interaction, loneliness, and the media effects directly related to these concepts. The review is divided roughly by decade, beginning with the literature published before the 1960s, then the literature of the 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s, and the 21st Century. The discussion is concluded with an overview of the three themes that emerge through the review, namely: ubiquitous contention, the application of identical arguments to newer media technologies, and the existence and resilience of specific camps of perspective.

1.1 Before the 1960s

Both parasocial interaction and loneliness have been historically couched within media effects research. An understanding of several key media effects theories (ex. uses and gratifications theory) and how these theories came to be is necessary for a rigorous chronological review of the parasocial interaction and loneliness literature. The earliest major theories of media effects include the direct effects model, the Two-step flow model of communication, and Shannon and Weaver's Information Theory. The direct effects model, also referred to as the hypodermic needle model or the magic bullet theory, was based not on empirical findings, but on the assumption of an audience that passively accepts whatever message is sent to them via media channels (Berger, 1995). Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet introduced the two-step flow model of communication in their 1944 study *The People's Choice*. Their model holds that a majority of people form opinions based upon those held by opinion leaders who gain initial exposure to specified media content and then interpret and disseminate an opinion-based response to the general public, thereby acting as a filter to the audience who are then referred to as the opinion followers (Katz, 1987). Comparably,

Shannon and Weaver's mathematical model of communication is centred on informational transmission (as opposed to its persuasion potential), and until mid-1960s was regarded as a sound scientific basis for communication process analysis in fields of social science and engineering (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011).

A later theory of importance for the current research is the uses and gratifications approach that emerged out of the various work of Herzog (1944), Lasswell (1948), Schramm (1954), and Maslow (1970). The majority of research into parasocial interactions from the beginning of the 1970s and on took place within the uses and gratifications approach (McQuail, 1972). Uses and gratifications is a functional approach² to understanding interactions between mass media and audience that postulates audience decisions regarding media consumption tend to shape the content and production of media (Katz & Foulkes, 1973). One of the most important elements of this approach was the notion that audiences are not passively overpowered by the media but rather, actively and purposefully use media to satisfy their needs (Katz & Haas, 1973).

The 1950s saw the birth of parasocial interaction theory and early steps in the conceptualization of loneliness. In the 1950 book, *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman tracks societal change through the lens of three social types: tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed. The first social type, tradition-directed, was defined as obeying rules that had long been established and were rarely altered. The inner-directed social type began to live as adults based upon what they learned in childhood. As consumer culture became prevalent, people began to define themselves based on the way other people lived, creating the third social type, the other-directed

² Functional in this context refers to the functional approach to mass communication that views the mass media as serving functions for society. Lasswell (1948) and Wright (1960) outline the five functions the media serves users: surveillance, correlation, transmission, entertainment, and mobilization. Within the functionalist approach humans have free will and as such as make choices regarding what media they consume (Katz & Blumler, 1974).

category. This work identified the category of ‘other-directed’ social type³ and arguably laid the groundwork for research examining the relationship between media effects, parasocial interaction, and loneliness.

The other-directed society was seen as providing an ideological framework that could arguably lead to loneliness on a mass scale insofar as other-directed individuals need constant assurance that they are in tune with other people emotionally. Riesman (1950) argues that in an other-directed society, autonomy becomes threatened because when people are only able to define their identity through their relationships with others, their ability to know themselves is restricted.

Several elements of the earlier understanding of parasocial interaction endure to this day. Although who—and more recently what—may be labeled a personae has changed over the years, the defining characteristics of a personae have remained largely unchanged. Personae are consistently described as predictable and non-threatening, addressing the audience directly in a conversational and personal manner similar to how one would address their friends during face-to-face interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Horton & Strauss, 1957). Personae sit at the core of parasocial interaction, however, they are only one aspect among many that enable parasocial interaction to occur.

The broadest definitions of personae identify them as media figures with which whom parasocial interaction is enacted. Personae are able to achieve a level of intimacy with individual audience members, eventually accumulating a history through which this bond of intimacy grows stronger. The most obvious examples of personae include talk-show hosts, actors, celebrities, and

³ Defined as a social type wherein the dominant desire is to relate to others, personal value is perceived by how closely one relates to how others are living and what others consume (Riesman, 1950).

newscasters (Horton & Wohl, 1956). From the moment the viewer begins watching a personae on a television or computer screen, a parasocial interaction event has begun. Its strength, however, is conditioned by the extent to which the conversational style and gestures of personae resemble those employed in personal interactions (Horton & Strauss, 1957 and Rubin et al., 1985). This personal style often is achieved through the use of specific appearances and gestures (e.g., the persona facing the viewer, directly addressing the viewer, and/or speaking to the audience as though the subject matter were private or personal) which trigger ordinary social perception and cues interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The behaviour of personae during each parasocial interaction event aids the viewer in forming an opinion about that personae that s/he then carries forward into the next parasocial event (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Every time one of these events occurs, a deeper sense of intimacy towards the personae develops within the audience member, and it becomes increasingly more likely that future viewing events will also occur. That said, the intimacy felt by the viewer towards the personae is an illusion—as the persona likely has no personal knowledge of the viewer—that is both passively and actively developed and maintained by the producers of the media production (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Some elements of this illusion occur naturally. For instance, as a viewer continues to watch a personae the list of ‘shared’ experiences between them grows, and as this occurs, the persona becomes more predictable and more intimately ‘known’ by the viewer. The illusion of intimacy is also created and maintained through more active measures, some of which include: duplication of the gestures and speaking style of informal face-to-face interactions, treating supporting cast members and technical assistants as though they were close friends, walking through and involving the studio audience; and/or referencing technical aspects of the program (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Coinciding with research into parasocial interaction was a going interest in the phenomenon of loneliness. Of the more than 200 peer-reviewed English language publications about loneliness printed in North America between 1932 and 1977 only twelve were published before the 1960s (Peplau, 1982). Studies at the time, most notably Sullivan (1953) and Fromm-Reichmann (1959), consisted largely of commentaries drawn from patient observation, with particular attention given to children, adolescents, the elderly, widows, and drug abusers. Throughout the 1950s, conceptual ambiguity was a prevalent feature of loneliness research, with disparate concepts such as aloneness, solitude, and isolation all placed under the banner of 'loneliness' (Fromm-Reichmann, 1959).

Fromm-Reichmann encapsulates the essential problem faced by any writer who confronts the 'problems of loneliness', which is the terminological gap created by the very experience and perception of loneliness itself. As early as the late 1950s she recognized a reluctance to clarify the concept in a meaningful way within the scientific community which was typified by the kind of behaviour normally associated with the loneliness experience, avoidance (Fromm-Reichmann, 1959). While there has been an effort to try and expand upon the definition of loneliness, which will be elaborated upon to some detail below in order to show its evolution, we must acknowledge our limitations as academics dealing with something that may very well be ideologically ingrained and therefore is likely to be taken for granted.

Nonetheless, loneliness was hypothesized to be a driving factor behind desires for escape that, in turn, lead to use of media that, in turn, lead to further loneliness and further media consumption (Katz & Foulkes, 1959). Riley & Riley (1951), for example, maintained that children who show signs of insecurity and difficulty in maintaining relationships are likely to watch more television. Four years later, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) reached a different conclusion, arguing

that people who consume the most media are more likely to be highly sociable, and to easily participate in face-to-face interactions.

A hypothesized direct connection between parasocial interaction and loneliness is clearly evident within Horton & Wohl's (1956) foundational text in which they refer to programs featuring personae as being extremely attractive to the socially isolated. In their view, media, and television in particular, offered lonely individuals a chance to experience the social interaction missing from their everyday lives. Indeed, they contended that the mass media had recognized the lonely segment of the population and purposively designed content that was targeted at this demographic. Katz & Foulkes (1959) echo this view, claiming that parasocial interaction is the direct result of a program aimed at lonely viewers.

1.2 The 1970s

It was not until the 1970s that significant interest in parasocial interaction returned, in large part due to the advent of the uses and gratifications approach to mass communication research. The definition of parasocial interaction did not undergo a great deal of change during this time, as the majority of the empirical studies conducted appeared to support the phenomena as it was described by Horton & Wohl (Giles, 2002). Without the ability to accurately perform measures of parasocial interaction and loneliness, it had been difficult for them to be fully conceptualized, facilitating potentially simplistic perspectives of the concepts and their relationship with one another.

By the 1970s attempts at measuring both parasocial interaction and loneliness started to be published. Initial measurements of parasocial interaction relied on content analyses of participant responses regarding their media preferences (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). Using data collected through focus groups and interviews, Levy (1979) created a 42-item psychometric scale for

measuring parasocial interaction. His scale was closely linked with the uses and gratifications paradigm and proved to be more successful in measuring parasocial interaction than its predecessors in terms of its role in television viewing motivation. Around the same time Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978) created the UCLA loneliness scale. This scale is a 20-item general measure of loneliness, with 10 items worded positively (people understand me) and 10 worded negatively (people do not understand me). It remained up to the participants to determine how often each statement described them (Perlman & Peplau, 1984).

The conceptualization of loneliness expanded rapidly during the 1970s, most notably with the publication of Weiss' (1973) *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation*. In this book he stressed that loneliness was not caused by being alone, but by the lack of a specific needed relationship and, therefore, random sociability would not alleviate loneliness and could actually aggravate it. During this period the hypothesized root cause of loneliness shifted from childhood experiences to relational deficits and demographics. In line with this emerging view, certain groups such as the poor, uneducated, unemployed, and minorities were increasingly considered to be the most prone to the experience of loneliness (Rubinstein, Shaver, & Peplau, 1979).

A particularly noteworthy element of loneliness research during this period was the distinction made between the loneliness of emotional isolation and the loneliness of social isolation. Weiss (1973) argued that these two types of loneliness would only disappear in the face of very specific forms of relationship; reintegration of a lost emotional attachment for the loneliness of emotional isolation, and access to an appropriate social network for the loneliness of social isolation. As loneliness research progressed, clearer distinctions between approaches to its understanding began to materialize. For example, and as outlined in Peplau and Caldwell's (1978)

review of the literature of the time, existential theorists saw loneliness as an inherent human trait, sociological theorists blamed cultural factors for loneliness, psychodynamic theorists saw loneliness as a result of unfulfilled needs for intimacy, interactionist theorists emphasized both personal and situational factors, and cognitive theorists maintained that loneliness was the result of cognitive processes. While the breadth of loneliness studies grew rapidly during the 1970s, they continued to rely primarily on clinical observation and remained generally isolated, with researchers utilizing different terminology and conceptions (Peplau & Caldwell, 1978).

The perspectives that dominated the 1970s regarding the relationship between the media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness exhibited similar levels of isolation. The dominant perspective at this time was one that viewed media use as positively correlated with loneliness, and saw this positive correlation as having negative effects for society. Nordlund's (1978) study of media interaction found a weak to moderate correlation between self-reports of media interaction and feelings of loneliness, thus suggesting that media interaction may lead to feelings of loneliness and/or loneliness may lead to media interaction. Perlman, Gerson, & Spinner (1978) found that the elderly were particularly likely to interact with media when feeling lonely. Both Nordlund (1978) and Perlman, Gerson, & Spinner (1978) came to the same conclusion that media interaction may lead to a dependence on the media and a future tendency to choose the media over other sources of company when feeling lonely. Elliott (1976) claimed that people use the media in order to escape from the difficulties of their actual lives. The companionship offered by parasocial interaction was argued to function primarily as an alternative to real life relationships, rather than in conjunction with them (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972).

While a positive correlation represented the primary perspective at this time, contention regarding the relationship between the media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness could still be

found. The findings of Atkin (1973), for example, suggested that parasocial interaction works in tandem with real-life relationships to satisfy social needs and decrease overall loneliness. This claim posits a negative correlation between parasocial interaction and loneliness, directly opposed to the arguments put forward by Rosengren & Windahl (1972), suggesting that parasocial interaction may serve a beneficial function for society.

1.3 The 1980s

From the 1980s onward, parasocial interaction was primarily defined as existing within the psychometric tradition of uses and gratifications research. The direct definition of parasocial interaction during the 1980s tended to be operationalized through variations of the scales created by Levy (1979) and Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985). Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) suggest that a host of activities extending beyond those originally posited by Horton & Wohl (1956) may be covered by the umbrella of parasocial interaction. Some of these activities include seeking guidance from media personae, seeking personae as friends, imagining oneself to be a part of the world of a media program, and wishing to meet with a media personae face to face.

The research of Perse & Rubin (1985) involved the use of uncertainty reduction theory to situate its hypotheses pertaining to the mediating factors in social behaviour that contribute to identification with a persona via parasocial interaction. Uncertainty reduction theory was formulated in order to draw a connection between affect and cognition. An example of this persists through individual's behaviour where they seek information in order to reduce uncertainty and in turn their 'liking' or affective response to what they know increases, especially as they are better able to predict the behaviour. Perse and Rubin examined the uncertainty reduction theory in conjunction with soap opera viewership to understand the underlying desire to reduce uncertainty

in one's social behaviour through vicarious interaction in new social circumstances via these personae.

Building on this work Rubin & Perse (1987) proposed three dimensions of parasocial interaction: cognitive, which revolves around attention paid to personae by the audience; affective, which refers to the degree of identification the audience feels with the personae; and behavioral, which is the overt reactions elicited by personae.

While loneliness remained a difficult concept to define, by the 1980s three points were generally agreed upon: loneliness results from relational deficiencies, loneliness is subjective, and the experience of loneliness is distressing (Peplau and Perlman, 1982). Loneliness was further broken down into two different forms by Spitzberg and Canary (1985): situational loneliness that occurs due to immediate short-term deficits through circumstance, and chronic loneliness which arises when loneliness is experienced separate from situational causes (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985).

The conceptualization of loneliness was further fragmented along lines of theoretical orientations during the 1980s (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). On one side was the inherent need for intimacy camp—which included authors such as Sullivan, Weiss, and Fromm-Reichmann—who argued that avoiding loneliness was contingent upon one's relationships satisfying a set of social needs inherent within all humans. On another side was the cognitive processes camp—which included authors such as Flanders, Sermat, Peplau, Perlman, and Altman—who maintained that loneliness occurs when a person's desired social relations do not match their actual social relations. A social reinforcement camp was to be found on a third side—at that time dominated by Young—and who maintained that the type and amount of social contact that is considered to be satisfying is dependent upon a person's reinforcement history.

Spitzberg & Canary (1985) attributed the causes of loneliness along three dimensions that they label controllability, stability, and locus. Together, these three dimensions are claimed to lead to a perpetuating cycle of loneliness wherein the longer a person is lonely, the more likely they see the loneliness as uncontrollable, stable, and their fault, thus re-confirming the validity of their loneliness and extending its duration further.

Another key feature of loneliness research during the 1980s was a shift toward trying to identify factors that could serve as predictors of loneliness. de Jong-Gierveld (1987), for instance, tested a model that examined such variables as living arrangements, personality and descriptive characteristics, and personal evaluations of social networks. Her study showed that living arrangement was the most accurate predictor of loneliness, with self-concept and personal evaluations of social networks also being accurate predictors of loneliness. These findings appeared to support earlier loneliness research suggesting that only specific types of relationships are effective at combating certain types of loneliness, and were further supported by Rook's (1987) and Finn & Gorr's (1988) studies of social relationships and types of loneliness. By contrasting the effects of social support and companionship on loneliness, Rook (1987) found that companionship was the more important predictor of the two. Finn and Gorr (1988) found that the loneliest people saw little to no benefit from social compensation, but people experiencing less intense loneliness saw great benefits from social compensation.

It is established that loneliness has been found to involve subjective perception, and the experiential evaluation of one's perceived isolation from, and diminished communication with others (de Jong-Gierveld, 1985). In this understanding, loneliness has quantitative and qualitative dimensions which correspond with the expectations surrounding the number of successful relationships achieved by an individual. The quantitative aspect is dealing with whether said

number is less than what is desired, and the qualitative deals with the failure to achieve intimacy to a desirable degree within existing relationships.

If loneliness is experienced as the unpleasant feeling that accompanies the belief that your social network is deficient, then it will be important to understand what creates this discrepancy. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the conditions that produce loneliness it would be advantageous to employ a discrepancy-attributional approach which emphasizes the discrepancy between the desired and achieved levels of one's social interaction (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). An advantage to this approach is that it recognizes how cognitive factors such as perceived control and causal attribution mediate between the emotional response and interpersonal deficiency thereby affecting subjective perception.

Other underlying factors have been identified by Peplau & Perlman (1981) in order to classify types of loneliness, the first having to do with where it sits on a positive-negative axis which runs through the loneliness experience. This can be determined by distinguishing between whether it is a matter of existential loneliness or one of loneliness anxiety. The existential variety suggests that there is an inevitable kind of loneliness which provides the context for self-confrontation and potential growth, which gives it a positive dimension, whereas loneliness anxiety results from a basic kind of alienation and is aversive (or negative).

Time has also been identified as a basis for classification, where loneliness may be a short-term, temporary state or experience versus a long-term or chronic trait where the individual might be viewed as a lonely person. Another important aspect used to identify loneliness types involves looking at the basis of social deficiency by distinguishing between emotional loneliness and social loneliness. The emotional variety encompasses a more painful kind of isolation, and deals more in the absence of meaningful personal relationships, whereas the social variety lacks a sense of

community or connectedness which tends to result from the combination of feeling unacceptable or rejected, and perhaps a little bit bored (Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

The development of the UCLA loneliness scale in the late 1970s fostered numerous empirical studies during the 1980s that focused on various aspects of the relationship between media effects, parasocial interaction, and loneliness. Rook & Peplau' (1982) study on the alleviation of loneliness found that 60 percent of their participants reported purposively consuming media as a way to distract themselves from feelings of loneliness 'sometimes', with 34 percent reportedly doing so 'often'. This figure was strikingly similar to the findings of Rubinstein & Shaver (1982), who found that 61 percent of the participants in their study of responses to loneliness claimed to watch television in response to loneliness. Schultz & Moore's (1984) study of loneliness attributions and coping among older adults found that 37 percent of respondents claimed to consume media in response to loneliness.

Whereas the above studies examined the general relationship between media use and loneliness, Rubin, Perse, & Powell (1985) concentrated on the relationship between loneliness and parasocial interaction specifically. The authors were able to show that loneliness was negatively correlated with the likelihood of seeking interpersonal relationships. Parasocial interaction was also negatively, to a small degree, related to loneliness. Reliance on television, however, was positively correlated with loneliness. Rubin, Perse, & Powell (1985) tested a model that attempted to use perceptions and behaviours associated with the instrumental value of media to linearly relate loneliness to parasocial interaction, but their findings remained inconclusive.

1.4 The 1990s

Before this time parasocial interaction had been defined as a unitary concept, but this conception began to be challenged during the 1990s. Gleich (1997) argued that by defining parasocial interaction instead as a cluster of three variables (companionship, person-program interaction, and empathetic interaction) most of the variance that appeared in studies until this time could be accounted for. By the early 1990s parasocial interaction was postulated as a major factor in motivating television viewing, and possibly the best predictor of television use of all behavioral measures (Giles, 2002). The importance allocated to parasocial interaction may have contributed to the greater concentration of studies seeking to better understand its causes and effects, as well as its potential implications vis-à-vis computer mediated communication. By the 1990s research on loneliness had also become voluminous (Ernst & Cacioppo, 2000) with particular focus paid to methods of measurement and understandings on the determinants and effects of loneliness.

During the mid-1990s, Thompson's work on the media and modernity put forth a concept with significant similarities to parasocial interaction in what he called mediated quasi-interaction. Thompson's (1995) represents a significant effort to situate parasocial interaction within theories of interaction as a whole, including face-to-face interaction and mediated interaction. As defined by Thompson (1995), mediated quasi-interaction involves the production of forms for an indefinite range of potential recipients. Just like parasocial interaction, mediated quasi-interaction is one-way in character, as only one side of the interaction is aware the interaction is simulated—parasocial. While the concept of mediated-quasi interaction is nearly identical to that of parasocial interaction, by directly situating it alongside other forms of interaction, Thompson paved the way for the upcoming works on the newest form of interactive media, computer mediated communication technology.

Early studies of computer-mediated communication attempted to compare this means of communication with face-to-face interaction and concluded that for groups it was as effective as face-to-face communication. For example, in their now classic study, Sproull & Kiesler (1991) postulated that work groups operating through computer-mediated groups were able to be at least as efficient as those working in face-to-face groups, and potentially even more efficient. Subsequent research such as that of Bordia's (1997) called these claims into question, suggesting that computer mediated communication was, in fact, inferior to its face-to-face counterpart because groups using computer mediated communication took longer than groups using face-to-face communication to complete identical tasks, and they also produced fewer remarks in the same time period. These shortcomings were later shown to be only temporary; given time, groups using computer-mediated communication adapt to the technology and are able to equal face-to-face groups in social-emotional conversation and task performance (Bordia, 1997).

The mainstreaming of the Internet and the World Wide Web during the 1990s opened new avenues of research into the relationship between the digital medium and parasocial interactions. Among other things, interest in the then new medium led to a revising of the term 'personae'. Whereas Horton & Wohl's definition referred to a specific type of television performer, one who "is seen engaged with others; but often...faces the spectator, uses the mode of direct address, [and] talks as if he were conversing personally and privately (p. 215), contemporary researchers define the term more broadly to include, implied relationships, other types of people, and even things.

The findings of Hoerner's (1999) study of the potential for parasocial interaction on the Web, for example, suggested that the host-characters used by some commercially sponsored websites can generate parasocial events among visitors to the websites just as easily as traditional television personae. He observed that by fostering parasocial relationships with visitors, these

fictional characters (e.g., Snoo of Reddit.com and The Gnome of Travelocity.com) were capable of encouraging visitors to continue using the site, thereby contributing to the site's advertising revenue. Understanding the impact of parasocial interaction on consumer beliefs and behaviors has remained one of the primary purposes for its continued examination among media scholars.

Several studies on during the 1990s provided further developments within the realms of measurement and effects of loneliness. Dugan & Kivett (1994), for instance, found that at this time measurements aimed at loneliness strongly correlates with measures of emotional loneliness (i.e. absence of meaningful personal relationships), but only weakly with social loneliness (i.e. absence of connections to a community), and concluded that social loneliness was more difficult to measure than emotional loneliness. The study by Dugan & Kivett fits into a larger trend at this time that insisted different types of loneliness existed and that these types were quite different from one another in both affect and in appeasement. Rotenberg (1994) found that lonely individuals act less trusting with strangers over time, further supporting the notion that only specific relationships can aide specific types of loneliness.

Several noteworthy advancements in the measurement of loneliness occurred during the 1990s. For example, DiTomasso & Spinner (1993) developed the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA), a multi-item assessment using three sub-scales: social loneliness, romantic loneliness, and family loneliness. The creation of this scale was in direct response to the consistent and pervasive notion that loneliness should be separated into two distinct constructs: emotional and social loneliness. Further advancements in measurement include Rokach's (1997) 5-factor model to account for the subjectivity of loneliness, hinting at self-perception and personality as potential determinants of loneliness. Through the 5-factor model, Rokach (1997) identified personal inadequacies, developmental challenges, unfulfilling interpersonal relations,

relocation, and social marginalization as five common determinants of loneliness. The creation of the SELSA scale by DiTomasso & Spinner and the 5-factor model and identification of common determinants outlined by Rokach, illustrate the growth in complexity that the concept of loneliness underwent during the 1990s, which before this time had been viewed as a fairly simplistic construct. This type of change in the accepted complexity of loneliness may represent a turning point in the overall academic understanding of the relationship between media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness, as will be later discussed.

During the 1990s, the state of the research on the relationship between media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness remained fairly consistent insofar as similar arguments were made as those seen in past decades, with less of a move towards an acceptance of complexity than may have been expected. By this decade only a few studies had directly examined the relationship, and these continued to illustrate the same contention amongst scholars seen during the 1970s and 1980s. By this time the contention in the field was widely recognized as problematic by several scholars (Perse & Rubin, 1990; Canary & Spitzberg, 1993; and Walther, 1993). Canary & Spitzberg (1993) attempted to explain the mixed findings and subsequent contention as a result of the growing qualitative complexity of loneliness, representing one of the only studies that suggested the need to avoid simple linear associations between loneliness and the media before the dawn of the 21st Century.

On one side of the contention, the researchers who argued that a negative correlation existed between loneliness and media use, the primary argument was that loneliness could lead to less active media use. Mirroring the findings of Rubin, Perse, & Barbato (1988), Perse & Rubin (1990) found that loneliness may lead to less active media use insofar as the findings emerging from their examination of the local television news and soap opera viewing habits of 380 non-

traditional students (enrolled in evening class at a large Midwestern American University) suggested that lonely television viewers watched media more passively than non-lonely television viewers, using this activity as a way to fill idle time or as a result of boredom.

On another side of the contention, several studies argued for the existence of a positive correlation between loneliness and media use, with the majority of these studies conducted on the effects of computer-mediated communication and its apparent negative societal effects. Walther (1993) claimed that, because computer-mediated communication was a more task-oriented form of communication it reduces group solidarity and interpersonal affect in comparison with face-to-face communication. Markus (1994) also argued against the use of computer mediated communication, stating that electronic communication filters out social cues and results in depersonalization, ultimately facilitating greater levels of loneliness. Motivated by findings including those of Walther (1993) and Markus (1994), Kraut, Patterson, & Lundmark (1998) conducted an in-depth study to determine whether the use of the internet might reduce social involvement and overall well-being. The researchers supplied 93 families who did not previously have internet access with computers and subsequently tracked their online activity for 2 years. The participants performed a self-evaluation at the beginning, middle, and end of the study aimed at evaluating their social involvement and psychological well-being. The results suggested that the use of the internet diminished communication between family, local, and distant social networks. The findings led them to conclude that loneliness was positively linked to greater internet use.

1.5 The 21st Century

Participatory media is a recent area of media effects research that can be traced back to the advent, within the late 19th century journalism, of periodicals that relied on reader contributions (Griffen-Foley, 2004). Today, the term participation renders images of just and democratic societies, user

controlled customization, and a positive force for social change (Fish, 2013). Enli (2009), for instance, argues that audiences should be included in the production process of media content and not simply limited to reception of content. In recent years the media industry has actively sought to incorporate participatory practices within their programming as is evidenced by the dramatic increase in reality television programming and ‘vote-in’ formats. The necessity of this shift does not lie in the idealist argument of empowerment or through the democratizing of television, but rather, it is necessary from a position of economic calculation. Media industries are simply responding to media users’ growing expectations of empowerment that have resulted in part from the digitalization and convergence of media content provided by the web (Enli, 2009).

The concept of the internet paradox⁴ came into focus in the 21st Century as scholars turned to the perceived problem of media addictions which resulted in decreased well-being and social involvement. Drawing from Kraut, Patterson, & Lundmark (1998), LaRose, Lin, & Eastin (2003) examined the impact of deficient self-regulation on media behavior of 465 college students and concluded that media addictions were attributable to deficient self-regulatory processes used by media consumers to adjust their own behaviour, and that this deficiency was significantly and positively correlated with internet use. The findings of both LaRose, Lin, & Eastin (2003), and Kraut, Patterson & Lundmark (1998) provoked criticism from Jackson, von Eye, Barbatsi, Biocca, Fitzgerald, & Zhao (2004), whose later study showed that the negative effects discovered presented in these studies actually dissipate over time as benefits begin to grow.

⁴ Defined as the understanding that internet use increases negative effects including depression and loneliness. The concept is considered paradoxical due to use of the internet primarily for communication, which is generally accepted as having positive effects (Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, Cummings, Hegelson, & Crawford, 2002).

Schramm & Hartmann (2008) developed a Parasocial Process Scale, with the aim of developing a tool that, when applied directly following TV exposure, can measure a viewer's parasocial process during media exposure. Their scale divides parasocial processing into three segments: cognitive response, affective response, and behavioral response. This tool has been found to display the intensity of parasocial interaction between media users and personae as well as how the parasocial interaction is processed without the prerequisite of a pre-existing parasocial relationship. Using this tool, Schramm & Wirth's (2010) show that the parasocial interaction-Process scales are able to be successfully applied in multiple contexts and able to uncover multiple dimensions of parasocial interaction. Similarly to the increased acceptance of the complexity of conceptual loneliness seen in the 1990s, the work of Schramm, Hartmann, and Wirth represents a growing acceptance among academics that parasocial interaction may be a much more complex concept than was originally posited.

The widespread distribution of loneliness has come to be accepted as a 'fact of life' in the 21st century. Zysberg (2015) refers to loneliness as the plague of the 21st century, presenting studies on the trajectories of loneliness that indicate that the majority of youth experience chronic loneliness. In their study of physical and mental health consequences of loneliness, mechanisms for its effects, and effectiveness of interventions, Hawkey and Cacioppo (2010) found that 80 percent of respondents under 18 years of age, and 40 percent of respondents over 65 years of age reported experiences of loneliness.

Alongside the growing acceptance of loneliness as a fact of life in the 21st Century, contention only grew in regards to perspectives on the relationship between loneliness, parasocial interaction, and the media. In their re-visitation of the internet paradox Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, Cummings, & Hegelson (2001) conducted surveys with 208 of the 335 participants originally

surveyed by Kraut, Patterson, & Lundmark (1998), finding that, among family members who had not previously used the internet prior to the study, internet use increases well-being and self-esteem for while also decreasing loneliness when used by extraverts. However, the opposite effect was found when introverts use the Internet.

By the beginning of the 21st Century, the idea that parasocial interaction could not be defined as a unitary concept was further supported by Auter & Palmgreen (2000) who argued for a four-factor solution. The four factors put forth were identification with a favorite character, interest in a favorite character, interaction with a group of favorite characters, and a favorite character's problem-solving abilities. By this time both parasocial interaction and loneliness had become more conceptually complex, potentially as a result of this the claim that the relationship between the concepts may also be too complex to allow for simple linear arguments became slightly more frequent by this time (see the work of: Shaw & Gant, 2002; Jackson, von Eye, Barbatsis, Biocca, Fitzgerald, & Zhao, 2004; and Yzer & Southwell, 2008).

Arguments refuting the presence of a relationship between loneliness, parasocial interaction, and the media became more commonplace during the first decade of the 21st Century. DiMaggio, Hargattai, Neuman, & Robinson (2001), who looked at the social implications of the internet, argued that new technologies such as television and the Internet did not result in vastly different social behaviour, and thus would not have a major impact on conditions such as loneliness. The inability to connect internet use to harmful consequences was reiterated by Shaw & Gant (2002), Franzen (2007), and Jackson et al. (2004) who were all unable to find a direct correlation between parasocial interaction and loneliness regardless of how psychological well-being and involvement were measured. Yzer & Southwell (2008) summarize the primary argument of these researchers, which touches upon the second theme that emerges from the current literature

review—the application of old arguments to new media technologies—as reflecting the view that while the current communication technologies are different in many ways from those of the past, major changes in theory are not required to understand their effects.

Of the authors who argued that a minimal relationship, or even no relationship existed, some (see, for example, Ling, 2000; DiMaggio et al., 2001; and Shaw & Gant, 2002) posited that were a correlation to be revealed it may be more likely for it to be negative rather than positive, wherein internet use actually detracts from loneliness. The development and maintenance of relationships suggests the benefits of computer-mediated communication, as more and more people maintain their relationships through computer-mediated interaction (Ling, 2000). New information and communication technologies allow for a great deal of control over the flow of information (DiMaggio et al., 2001), this in turn may lead to an increase in social involvement as greater bonds and relationships are formed online and sometimes continue to the real world (Kraut et al., 2001). Because Internet use can enhance social involvement, it is argued that internet use may actually decrease loneliness among users (Shaw & Gant, 2002).

Long, Seburn, Averill, & More (2003) suggest that people who consider solitude to be a negative experience would be likely to turn to the media to cope. A path analysis⁵ conducted by LaRose, Lin, & Eastin (2003) appeared to support this claim insofar as their examination of deficient self-regulation of internet usage demonstrated that media habits among 465 American college students form to alleviate loneliness and depression, leading to increased media use. It is suggested by Palmer (2003) that this process can lead to a vicious cycle, as users are increasingly able to instantly filter the information that they receive, they limit their exposure, seeking out

⁵ A path analysis a method aimed at estimating the magnitude and significance of hypothesized causal connections between sets of variables (Zhang, 2015).

information to affirm the ideas that they already hold, leading to greater isolation, greater loneliness, and greater media use.

Of those who continue to suggest the existence of a negative relationship, the topics of computer-mediated communication, and more recently social media sites have been areas of focus. In their examination of electronic media use among university students Jacobsen & Forste (2011) found that for each hour increase in cellphone or SMS communication, face-to-face interaction increased by 10-15 minutes. These authors hypothesize that because SMS use is often used to coordinate face-to-face plans, this form of media use should result in a reduction of experienced loneliness. Looking at the relationship between Facebook and Myspace use and face-to-face interaction Kujath (2011) came to similar conclusion regarding the use of computer-mediated communication, suggesting that it enables the broadening and maintenance of relationships that would otherwise fail, thereby strengthening social circles and reducing perceived loneliness.

The arguments made for the existence of a positive correlation between media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness since 2010 are similar to those made in earlier decades, with the biggest difference being the type of media to which the arguments are applied. Stout (2010), for example, draws on the figures presented by the Pew Research Center that states that, as of May 2010, half of American teenagers send 50 or more texts a day, with one third sending more than 100 messages a day. Based on these figures, she argues that since social networking platforms like Facebook allow people to interact without ever actually meeting, they can detract from friends and relationships in real life. The findings of Bian & Leung's (2015) study of the relationship between smartphone addictions and loneliness offers some support for this view insofar as they showed a strong positive correlation between loneliness and the likelihood of becoming addicted to smartphone interactions.

Some of the major concerns regarding the relationship between modern media use and loneliness are detailed in Sherry Turkle's (2011) book *Alone Together*. Turkle posits that as we become more lonely and fearful of intimacy in contemporary society, digital connections become particularly attractive. According to her, the networked world which initially seemed uniquely suited to appease our loneliness and our overscheduled lives, has caused us to lessen our expectations of each other and, ultimately, increased our overall loneliness. Turkle illustrates a vicious cycle wherein people feel overwhelmed by life and submerge themselves in media, but as the media begins to take them away from real-life social interaction, it becoming more and more necessary for these individuals while at the same time generating greater and greater loneliness. The arguments applied to digital media technologies by Turkle in 2011 closely parallel the arguments applied to traditional media technologies by Riesman in 1950, providing the most apparent suggestion of the second emergent theme—the application of old arguments to new media technologies—to be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

The perspective that the relationship between the media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness may be too complex to allow for straightforward correlation has gained some ground in recent years. Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carroll, & Jensen (2010) conducted a study of video game and internet use during emerging adulthood and found that the impact of media use on relationship quality with friends differs according on what type of media is used (e.g., video games vs. email). In their review of media use, effects, and gratifications in emerging adulthood Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard (2013) also found that exposure to media, even of the same type, can result in widely different positive and negative outcomes.

1.6 Emergent Themes

Through the chronological review of the literature, three themes emerge, these are: ubiquitous contention among researchers, recurring arguments applied to newer media technologies, and specific and resilient camps of perception into which researchers fit.

The first emergent theme, contention has been a defining feature of research about parasocial interaction and loneliness since the 1950s. Not only is there always contention over whether there is a positive correlation, a negative correlation, or no correlation at all, but this contention appears to be sporadic, with some decades dominated by arguments of a negative correlation (1990s) and others dominated by arguments of a positive correlation (1970s). A brief reiteration of the general perspectives held by researchers during each time period reviewed reveals the level to which contention has permeated the field.

Throughout that 1950s the notion of a direct positive correlation between these parasocial interaction and loneliness was dominant (ex. Horton & Wohl, 1956; Horton & Strauss, 1957; Katz & Foulkes, 1959; and Riley & Riley, 1959), however, the possibility of a negative correlation was also acknowledged (ex. Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). By the 1970s the relationship between parasocial interaction, and loneliness began to be investigated more directly, as opposed to past decades in which the two concepts were mostly investigated independently, with the body of empirical evidence supporting the notion of a direct positive correlation between loneliness and media use (ex. Rosengren & Windahl, 1972; Elliott, 1976; Perlman, Gerson, & Spinner, 1978; and Nordlund, 1978). Contention continued to exist at this time as a minority of alternative findings also began to emerge in support of a direct negative correlation between loneliness and media use (ex. Atkin, 1973). The 1980s were marked by continued debate about whether the correlation between loneliness, parasocial interaction, and the media was positively correlated (ex. Rook &

Peplau, 1982; Rubinstein & Shaver, 1982; and Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985) or negatively correlated (ex. Rook, 1987 and Finn & Gorr, 1988). However, alternative arguments suggesting that there may not be any relationship between media use, parasocial interaction, and loneliness also began to gain credence (ex. Austin, 1985). In the 1990s, there appears to have been a shift towards the support of a direct negative correlation (ex. Perse & Rubin, 1990, Walther, 1993, and Markus, 1994) It was also during this decade that claims suggesting that the relationship between media use and loneliness may be too complex to linearly correlate started to be advanced. Since the turn of the 21st Century contention regarding the relationship has only continued to grow as scholars continue to make contrasting claims of a negative (ex. Ling, 2000; Jacobson & Forste, 2011; and Kujath, 2011), positive (ex. Long et al., 2003; LaRose, 2003; Palmer, 2003; Stout, 2010; and Bian & Leung, 2015), non-existent (ex. DiMaggio et al, 2001; Shaw & Gant, 2002; Franzen, 2007), or complex (ex. Kraut et al., 2001; Shaw & Gant, 2002; Jackson, von Eye, Barbatsis, Biocca, Fitzgerald, & Zhao, 2004; and Yzer & Southwell, 2008; Padilla-Walker, 2010; and Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013) relationship between the media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness.

The second theme to emerge through the reviewed literature is revealed by focusing on the specific media technologies discussed along the timeline with regards to the technology's place in understanding the relationship between the media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness. With the emergence of a new media technology a predictable pattern begins characterized by a surge of activity surrounding the impact of the new media technology. This surge aligns along the same lines of contention as the previous decades with some adjustments and additions made to better fit the new media technology.

Until the late 1980s, the majority of the literature focused on the relation of parasocial interaction and loneliness to television, the most recent dominant media technology of the time. The pattern can then be traced through the response to the emergence of computer mediated communication and the internet in the 1990s (ex. Sproull & Kiesler, 1991; Walther, 1993; Markus, 1994; Bordia, 1997; Kraut, Patterson, & Lundmark, 1998; and Hoerner, 1999). More recently the pattern is visible in the academic response to social networking sites and smart phones (ex. Padilla-Walker, 2010; Stout, 2010; Turkle, 2011; Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard; and Bian & Leung, 2015).

As outlined through the first theme, the contention over whether there is a relationship and whether said relationship is positive or negative ebbs and changes over time, but is always present. Despite the contending perspectives advanced, three consistent arguments can be seen to reappear on a fairly regular basis, only applied to a newer media technology. The first of these recurring arguments is that media use can provide the interaction that is missing in the everyday lives of the lonely. This argument has been applied to television use by Horton & Wohl (1956) and Rosengren & Windahl (1972), to internet use by Hoerner (1999), and to smartphone use by Bian & Leung (2015). The second recurring argument is that media use is isolating and can thus contribute to loneliness. This argument has been applied to television by Horton & Strauss (1957), to computer use by Markus (1994), to internet use by Kraut, Patterson, & Lundmark (1998), and to social media use by Stout (2010). The third recurring argument is that media use motivated by loneliness can lead to dependence on the media and even greater future loneliness. This argument has been applied to television by Katz & Foulkes (1959), to internet use by Palmer (2003), and to social media and smartphone use by Turkle (2011).

For each of these recurring arguments very little changes between each additional application, aside from the media technology that they are applied to. With the same general arguments being repeated over and over again during the past 65 years, the greatest change to the contention over the relationship seems to be not what arguments are being made, but the media technologies to which these arguments are applied.

The third theme to emerge through the chronological literature review is the existence of 7 persistent camps that academics fall into with regards to their perspective on the relationship between the media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness. The perspective camp that a researcher belongs to at the time of publishing can be assigned based on the researchers answer to the following questions:

1. Is there a direct relationship between the media, parasocial interaction, and loneliness?
 - a. If no, is the absence of a relationship good or bad?
 - b. If yes is the relationship positive or negative?
 - i. If the relationship is positive is that good or bad?
 - ii. If the relationship is negative is that good or bad?

By examining how a researcher answers these questions through the arguments presented in their work, one can ascertain which of the 7 perspective camps s/he fits into (outlined in *figure1*). The 7 emergent perspective camps can be defined by the following statements:

1. There is no relationship, and that is a good thing (ex. DiMaggio, Hargattai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001 and Yzer & Southwell, 2008).
2. There is no relationship, and that is a bad thing (ex. Ling, 2000 and Franzen, 2007).

3. There is a positive relationship, and that is a good thing (ex. Rook & Peplau, 1982 and Schultz & Moore, 1984).
4. There is a positive relationship, and that is a bad thing (ex. Horton & Wohl, 1956; Katz & Foulkes, 1959; and Rosengren & Windahl, 1972).
5. There is a negative relationship, and that is a good thing (ex. Atkin, 1973 and Shaw & Gant, 2002).
6. There is a negative relationship, and that is a bad thing (ex. Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988 and Perse & Rubin, 1990).
7. There is a complex relationship that cannot be linearly correlated (ex. Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carroll, & Jensen, 2010 and Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013).

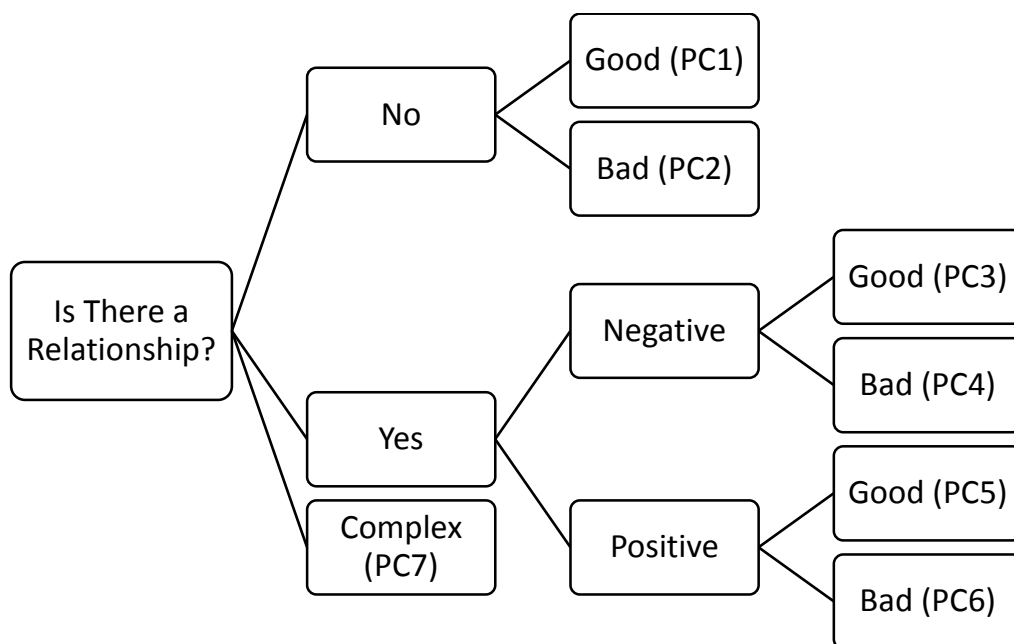


Figure 1

The existence of these perspective camps first and foremost reveals an area of research that is extremely divided. Not all of the 7 perspective camps outline existed from the outset of

parasocial interaction and loneliness research, with the camp that posits a complex relationship being the most recent addition. What is notable, however, is the staying power of these camps; once a perspective camp is established it continues to exist from that point onward, at least they have continued to exist until the current time of writing.

These three themes appear to provide support for the existence of some of the patterns in the literature initially suggested. The introduction of a new media technology (in the present case television, computer mediated communication, the internet, social networking sites, and smart phones) does appear to create a burst of activity in the field, or at least generates a focal point for academic attention. The division of scholars into camps based on perspective also appears to be supported by the literature. Rather than simple division over the 'good' or 'bad' socio-cultural impacts of new media, the perspective camps appear to be even more divided than originally posited. Finally, the eventual acceptance of complexity is partially supported, however, not to the extent that was expected. While in more recent years the assertion of relationship that is too complex to be linearly correlated has become more common, it has yet to become the dominant perspective and following the trends of the past 65 years it may never be.

3. Discussion

This section offers a discussion of the three themes—ubiquitous contention, the application of repetitive arguments to newer media technologies, and the existence and resilience of specific camps of perspective—that emerged through the chronological review of the literature published on parasocial interaction, loneliness, and the media. The discussion aims to explore some potential reasons that these themes exist within the literature reviewed as well as what implications these themes may offer.

3.1 Ubiquitous Contention

The same effects that are argued to impact society may also impact the researchers writing about that society. This may be the case when it comes to the matter of the consistent and sporadic contention surrounding the academic perspectives on the relationship between parasocial interaction, loneliness, and the media. As customization increases we must begin to ask ourselves if we are necessarily becoming more insular. If the majority of the information that we consume only paints a partial picture due to the tendency for selective exposure that may very well be growing up and around our technology use (the primary source of information collection) then the user is essentially constantly surrounded by a cocoon that caters to their interests and serves their purpose. The thing same could be said of social networking sites, where you have the potential to be constantly surrounded by social components that resemble friendship but without any of the potential friction of real life interaction, could arguably be said about academic research.

Sonia Livingstone (1996) points to cultural anxieties as an additional explanation for the ubiquitous contention present in the media effects research. The contention that surrounds the interpretation of media effects findings may not be about the findings themselves, but about the

broader debate in which the mass media is made a scapegoat for cultural anxieties. When making arguments based upon media effects findings it is nearly impossible for scholars to remove themselves from the deeply entrenched cultural anxieties that these findings relate to, ultimately facilitating the contentious research environment that can still be seen today.

Lang (2013) claims that the field of mass communication is in a state of crisis, and that this crisis is the result of the paradigm's lack of progress in answering questions about media effects. Debate can, in many instances, be a positive thing for a field of research, but when that debate is as repetitive and long-standing as the one seen in the media effects literature it may prove harmful to the field as a whole. Were the contention in the field lessened, with a greater concentration on unifying concepts and theories, it is possible that more fruitful progress could be made at a faster pace than what exists at present (Lang, 2013).

3.2 Repetition of Arguments and Newly Emergent Media Technology

The patterns of ubiquitous and sporadic contention that emerge through the chronological review of the parasocial interaction and loneliness literature of applying old arguments to newer media technologies may be partially explained by the concept of short-termism. Andrew G Haldane, the chief economist for the Bank of England, likens short-termism to a sociological headwind for it is inconsistent with historical trends dealing with levels of patience in a society as they relate to growing technological trends. Previously, those trends pointed toward a rise in overall patience levels, but those trends appear to have turned. While this perspective could fall into one of the camps deriding the impact of technology, it appears to make valid points with respect to the potential for technology to neurologically 'rewire' us, the most notable examples including the 15th century printing press and the 21st century Internet.

There have been significant benefits to being a part of what he terms the information

revolution, but in recognizing these 'goods' he also acknowledges potential cognitive costs, citing Herbert Simon, an information theorist, who has spoken to the effect of an information-rich society becoming attention-poor. What this could mean for a society is shorter-term decision-making, which could impair attainment and accumulation of any kind of capital, therefore harming any prospect of medium-term growth. While this perspective is framed in economic terms, it draws upon a qualitative determinant such as patience, and applies it to a quantitative measure of capital, in this case social capital, which implies that a less patient society will not foster as many meaningful relationships (Haldane, 2015).

The same short termism that impairs capital as well as society, may impact the literature on the relationship between parasocial interaction and loneliness as well. The rapid development of media technology facilitates the repetition of older arguments to these newly emerged media effects, whereas a long period of little technological development may force scholars to put forth new arguments instead.

An alternative, and much simpler, explanation for why the same arguments keep getting made and applied to newly emerged media technologies, is that new arguments are not necessary. Within Yzer & Southwell's (2008) review of academic reactions to emergent communication technology, the authors suggest that the emergence of a new media technology and the subsequent discussion of societal effects may be simply another step in a very old trend that occurs with the introduction of each new communication technology. Through their review, Yzer & Southwell conclude that entirely new media theory and arguments are usually not required in order to facilitate an understanding in relation to a newly emerged media technology.

Charles Taylor posits that it is modernity itself that serves as a primary problem to the social sciences, but it stands to reason that an amalgam of historically unprecedented practices,

new institutional forms and lifestyle choices may come into conflict with older understandings and foster a new form of malaise. Perhaps we will never be able to keep up with the inevitable changes a culture sustains with the advent of new technologies, but it cannot simply be just a matter of blaming new technological trends, the level of industrial production and rate of urbanization.

This is not to say that the arguments of the past should never be applied to newly emerged media technologies. Both Yzer & Southwell (2008) and Lang (2013) stress that newly emerged media technologies do not always require entirely new media theories to be understood, but older questions regarding media effects cannot represent the only questions being asked. In order for the field to progress, new angles and paths of inquiry must be consistently explored, lest the field as a whole risk stagnation.

3.3 Camps of Perception

Building off of the (1985) work of Perse & Rubin on the relationship between parasocial interaction and uncertainty reduction, Hirsh, Mar and Peterson (2012) offer an explanation with respect to situating this phenomenon pertaining to uncertainty-related anxiety that fits within a framework of psychological entropy. The framework may offer a potential explanation of why contentious perspective camps form, as well as why they tend to remain permanently once they have become established. This framework is called the Entropy Model of Uncertainty, and consists of four major tenets:

- a) Individuals are motivated to keep uncertainty at a manageable level because it creates a critical adaptive challenge to an organism;
- b) Uncertainty manifests out of the conflict between competing behavioural and perceptual affordances (or conditions, namely the relationship between objects, subjects

and their environment, which afford the subject an opportunity to perform an action, or inhibits in this case);

- c) Uncertainty may be constrained through the adoption of belief structures and promotion of clear goals which will reduce the likelihood of competing affordances;
- d) Uncertainty tends to manifest as a subjective anxiety.

While uncertainty may be constrained through well-organized belief systems or social environments, when taken too far the resulting impetus could take on a rigid (or dogmatic) cognitive form. While it may seem advantageous to minimize short-term entropy through a decisive pattern of behaviour, such behaviour might be construed as a form of wilful ignorance, and the long-term effect could be characterized as an adaptive failure, resulting in a pathological manifestation (Hirsh, Mar, & Peterson, 2012). Put simply, the 7 identified perspective camps may represent a form of belief system, becoming rigid due to efforts to constrain uncertainty, and potentially resulting in a field that could see greater development were it less fragmented.

Taken together, these three themes—ubiquitous contention, the application of repetitive arguments to newer media technologies, and the existence and resilience of specific camps of perspective—paint an image of a field of research that is contentious, repetitive, and massively fragmented. It is difficult to say exactly how the field could be improved did it not exhibit these characteristic themes, but it seems only logical that a field can only benefit from more progress and less fragmentation.

4. Conclusion

A few ideas can be taken away from this which resonate with the themes of the discussion, primarily the potential for addiction to prescribed forms, likely championed by the popular (those with the power to exercise control); secondly, addiction to or dependency upon something to fulfil a basic need or desire may amplify the expectation surrounding it; and thirdly, in order to move beyond old patterns academics must try to remain aware of their place within the society that they are examining and what limitations this may present them with respect to their outlook. The potential reasons put forth through this discussion simply represent examples of some of many possibilities. A larger-scale empirical study is required to fully develop and explore the themes that have emerged through the review of the literature.

The central purpose of this work is to provide the first steps of an examination of a pattern that appears to exist within the communication and media effects literature. The suggested pattern is one wherein a new media technology is introduced, academics investigating this new media technology then split into several camps, with some trumpeting the societal good that will come from the new technology and others warning of harmful effects. The pattern was hypothesized to eventually conclude as over time scholars converge on the argument that the relationship is too complex to allow for simple linear correlations with society or well-being. In order to examine this potential relationship, an examination of the communication and media literature spanning over the past 65 years was reviewed, with a focus on the conceptions of parasocial interaction and loneliness.

While the review did confirm that academics became divided regarding the positive and/or negative implications of parasocial interaction, loneliness, and their related media effects, the findings did not match exactly those that were hypothesized. Rather than simply dividing along

lines of perspective on societal good or bad, the camps that academics split into were more numerous and complex. Further, while the amount of scholars arguing for a ‘too complex’ relationship began to steadily increase as time went on, it has yet to become a dominant perspective in the field. Alongside this pattern, three themes emerged through the review of the literature, these were: longstanding contention within the field, the application of repeated arguments to newer media technologies, and the existence of 7 perspective camps. These themes highlight some of the major trends and issues that should represent a central focus for future research into the relationship between the media, loneliness, and parasocial interaction. The first step to improving the field of research is to recognize what needs improvement, and these themes may provide areas in which this improvement can begin.

Just as much as it can be argued that loneliness is not inevitable, we must acknowledge an axiomatic truth that change is (inevitable); whether the technology brings it about faster or holds the potential to limit how we perceive it is almost beside the point. Aldous Huxley wrote a forward to Jiddu Krishnamurti's book *The First and Last Freedom* in which he states that “addiction to formulas is almost universal...inevitably so...for our system of upbringing is based upon *what* to think, not *how* to think... [for] we are brought up as believing and practising members of some organization...[and] consequently you respond to the challenge, which is always new, according to an old pattern” (Huxley in Jiddu, 1975 p.13).

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