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Viewer Aggression and Attraction to Television Talk Shows

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Guided by the uses and gratifications perspective, we examined how dispositional factors—aggression, anger, attitudes toward women, and communication anxiety and reward—and television-viewing factors—motivation, attitudes, topics, emotions, and parasocial interaction—explained attraction to different TV talk shows. We considered how these dispositional and viewing factors discriminated among different talk show preferences and different levels of aggression. Compared with The Oprah Winfrey Show viewers, Jerry Springer viewers thought shows were less realistic; enjoyed watching voyeuristic topics and guests' being angry, embarrassed, shocked, and hurt; watched to be entertained and excited rather than to be informed; and developed fewer parasocial relationships. Compared with persons with low levels of aggression, those with high levels of aggression were angry; had negative attitudes toward women; enjoyed watching guests' being embarrassed, angry, shocked, and hurt; thought others did not value their interpersonal interactions; and watched talk shows more often, especially to interact with others. We discuss the implications of these findings.

Fairly widespread agreement exists that television contains much violence and that exposure to such content prompts viewer aggression (e.g., Comstock & Strasburger, 1990). Some researchers have argued that the "television industry has long considered violence an effective means of attracting viewers" (Scott, 1996, p. 744) and that individuals who are most attracted to violent or arousing media content are those with aggressive personalities (Atkin, Greenberg, Korzenny, & McDermott, 1979; Blanchard, Graczyk, & Blanchard, 1986; Bryant, 1989; Diener & DeFour,

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1978; Hansen & Hansen, 1990). In this study, we sought to link individual motivation and dispositions with attraction to certain media content.

One television genre that has been criticized for relying on violent, arousing, or emotionally charged content to attract viewers is the talk show (e.g., Tavener, 2000). Just as viewers differ in their levels of disposition aggression, talk shows differ in their levels of arousing or violent content. Some talk shows such as *Jerry Springer* include much higher levels of violence, aggression, and voyeurism than do others, such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

We adopted a uses and gratifications framework for this study. Basically, "what people do and can be brought to do with mass communication may largely determine what mass communication does and can be brought to do to people" (Klapper, 1963, p. 523). Social roles and psychological dispositions affect the selection, uses, and effects of media content (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973). The dispositions, motivations, and attitudes that people bring with them to the media encounter influence their media choices, their media involvement, and the potential consequences of media exposure (A. M. Rubin, 2002). Research suggests certain dispositions, motivations, and attitudes that may make television talk shows attractive to some viewers and discriminate among levels of aggressiveness among these viewers. Guided by this perspective, we sought to understand how individual differences in such factors as anger and aggression attract viewers to different forms of television talk shows.

Uses and gratifications is an audience-centered perspective that emphasizes the role of choice based on people's individual differences—especially their social and psychological circumstances—in mediating how communication channels are used and in enhancing or lessening media effects (A. M. Rubin, 2002). As Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) explained, the perspective is concerned with

> (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (p. 20)

Uses and gratifications research is "an effort to understand 'effects,'" whether we consider the media as "agents of diversion and entertainment" or as "agents of information and influence" (Katz et al., 1973, p. 32). Uses and gratifications researchers have sought to approach media effects by first connecting individual needs and goals to outcomes of media use. Klapper (1963) explained that studies of this type "conceptually restore the audience member to his rightful place in the

dynamic, rather than leaving him in the passive, almost inert, role to which many older studies relegated him" (p. 527).

On the basis of the belief that audience members are variably active in their choice making (Blumler, 1979), researchers have explored how audience activity and involvement mediate outcomes. This exploration has produced a distinction, for instance, between *ritualistic* media use (i.e., more habitual use of the medium) and *instrumental* media use (i.e., more goal-directed seeking of certain media content). In general, instrumental media use has been linked to increased audience activity and media involvement, exposure to informational content, and perceived realism of that content (e.g., Perse, 1990b). For example, Hawkins et al. (2001), found that viewing motives based on mood and content preferences predicted selective viewing and thinking while viewing; content-preference motivation predicted attentive viewing. Further, individual dispositions and life position affect activity, functional alternatives, and outcomes (e.g., A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1985). Although people are constrained by the available alternatives, uses and gratifications theory emphasizes the goal directedness of individuals (A. M. Rubin, 2002). That is, people choose among the available media, and these choices are often purposeful and consequential.

In addition, exposure is a critical component in media effects. According to the uses and gratifications perspective, exposure means more than just the time a person spends with a medium. First, it is important to contextualize the media experience and to examine relevant individual dispositions and television-viewing factors that influence media choices and processes, such as attraction to talk shows. An individual's personality, motivation, attitudes, emotions, and relationships matter (A. M. Rubin, 2002). Consumers bring attitudinal, perceptual, and selectivity biases to the media experience (Bryant & Zillmann, 1984). Cognitively and emotionally, people are variably active and involved participants when they use media and media content (Perse, 1990a; A. M. Rubin, 1993, 1998, 2002).

Second, media, genre, and content, including the topics presented, matter when researchers are seeking to explain not only how and why people use the media, but also the potential effects of media use (e.g., Potter, 1997; Potter & Chang, 1990; A. M. Rubin, Perse, & Taylor, 1988). As Katz et al. (1973) observed, the media satisfy a variety of needs "arising from social roles and psychological dispositions" (p. 61); such needs usually "take the form of (1) *strengthening* or weakening, (2) a *connection*—cognitive, affective, integrative (3) with some *referent*—self, friends, family and traditional, social and political institutions, others" (p. 61). Preference for or exposure to different media genres is differentially linked to dispositions, motivation, selectivity, and viewing activity (Hawkins et al., 2001).

TELEVISION TALK SHOWS

Television talk shows have been popular in recent years. The TV talk show is a genre that often includes violent and voyeuristic content. The subject matter is often about interpersonal conflict and relationships. Television talk shows "invite audience participation" and "often highlight physical or moralistic conflict and confrontation among guests and studio audience members" (A. M. Rubin & Step, 1997, p. 106). Since the 1980s, talk shows have been broadcast on all major networks and are seen by millions of people (Munson, 1993). Talk shows are "a readily available barometer of public opinion, an imaginary and discursive space where topical issues 'sizzle' and political 'bashing' can happen in a safe anonymity" (Munson, 1993, p. 4).

Much of the research on television talk shows has focused on the content or program participants. Greenberg, Sherry, Busselle, Hnilo, and Smith (1997) noted that research on talk shows is sparse, and most of it has focused on literary analysis, audience orientation, and guest pathology. For instance, Peck (1995) analyzed daytime talk shows as therapeutic discourse. She suggested that talk shows focus on conflicts that occur behind the scenes but are brought on camera to be resolved. Hence, talk shows make private matters public, give attention to overlooked people, and dramatize public issues. Peck noted that talk show hosts "exercise power through strategic communication which allows them to cut off and dismiss, or invite and draw out other speakers" (p. 65). The hosts play a major role in these conflicts, and much of the enjoyment of talk shows is based on viewers' parasocial relationships with the hosts.

Similarly, Brinson and Winn (1997) examined interpersonal conflicts and gender differences presented on talk shows. They found that the female–male dyad was the predominant conflict dyad and that men and women displayed similar conflict strategies on talk shows; men were less likely to dominate the conflict. In a content analysis of television talk shows, Greenberg et al. (1997) found that parenting was the most prevalent topic. The shows also tended to focus on sexual topics, dating, and family issues. A. M. Rubin and Step (1997) found that viewers are drawn to television talk shows that deal with personal and relational topics.

Television talk shows have also been criticized for their content. Tavener (2000) accused talk shows of emphasizing sensation seeking to increase ratings and revenues. She observed that talk shows present misinformation and innuendo and highlight embarrassing and personal "pain and suffering" arising from everyday conflicts (p. 80).

Jerry Springer is one talk show that has attracted much attention from viewers and critics since 1991 (Trigoboff, 1998). The show is seen in about 200 U.S. and many international markets (Universal Domestic Television, 2002). Trigoboff

found that more children watch this talk show than children who watch shows that are specifically designed for them. Schlosser (1997) observed that the appeal of Springer's talk show is violence. The confrontations during the show are often more appealing than the topics or the guests.

Despite its success, *Jerry Springer* has been criticized for its content. The *BBC News* (Springer's Shows, 1998) noted that the program was too violent and quoted an Independent Television Commission (ITC) report that stated, "The participants are frequently drawn from the poorer segments of American society and invited to parade their faults and misfortunes for public entertainment." The ITC found guests on the show to engage constantly in verbal and physical violence, which it termed "victim entertainment."

Including violent content has a long-standing tradition of success in attracting viewers (e.g., Barnouw, 1990; Scott, 1996). Nonetheless, the talk show is a unique genre for commingling violent content with other content that is attractive to certain viewers. A uses and gratifications examination of how relevant audience characteristics link to such content should help us begin to identify profiles of talk show viewers. Focusing on the viewer also addresses a gap in prior talk show research that, to date, has focused predominantly on the content. The application of the assumptions of the uses and gratifications perspective requires consideration of relevant individual dispositional and television-viewing characteristics. In this study, we sought to examine whether enjoyment of topics presented on television talk shows and enjoyment of emotions experienced by talk show guests relate to dispositional anger and aggression and influence attraction to different talk shows.

INDIVIDUAL DISPOSITIONAL FACTORS

The audience-centered focus of uses and gratifications theory suggests that individual differences are important factors to consider with regard to media uses and effects processes. For example, individual dispositions can affect both expectations about the media (e.g., attraction) and behavioral responses to the media (e.g., aggression). Not all such differences can be included in one study. However, past research has identified several individual background or dispositional factors that are especially relevant to this inquiry.

Aggression

Through the years, researchers have found positive links between aggressive attitudes and behavior and exposure to violent television content (Paik & Comstock,

1994) and between aggressive attitudes and other arousing fare (Hansen & Hansen, 1990). Whereas many researchers have argued that viewers who are exposed to violent content become more aggressive (see Comstock & Strasburger, 1990; Gunter, 1994; Paik & Comstock, 1994), other investigators have suggested that aggressive predispositions are the cause of the effect (e.g., Dorr & Kovaric, 1980). For instance, Huesmann and Eron (1986), noted that aggressive tendencies predicted adult antisocial behavior, particularly as such tendencies interacted with situational factors. In addition, initial aggressiveness may lead to specific effects such as acceptance of rape myths (Malamuth & Check, 1985), which suggests the need to consider participants' attitudes toward women in relation to aggressive tendencies and talk show viewing.

Uses and gratifications theory has only occasionally been applied to studying television violence (e.g., Greenberg, 1974, 1975; Haridakis, 2002). Consistent with the assumptions of uses and gratifications theory about the importance of individual characteristics, the results of other studies suggest a link between aggressive tendencies and exposure to violent media content. For example, Diener and DeFour (1978) found a positive relationship between aggressive personalities and liking program violence, especially among college males. McIntyre, Teevan, and Hartnagel (1972) found that approving of violence and believing in higher levels of societal violence correlated with watching violent shows. Robinson and Bachman (1972) found a significant correlation between high school students' delinquent behavior and a preference for violent television programs. Krcmar and Greene (2000) found risk-taking behavior (e.g., delinquency) to relate positively to viewing realistic crime programs and contact sports. In addition, when studying youthful offenders, Heller and Polsky (1976) found these youths' greatest preference was to watch law-and-order or crime shows, followed by war pictures, westerns, violent sports programs, and horror movies.

In all, then, a link between aggression and selecting violent fare has been a consistent research finding. In light of this research linking aggression and televised violence, and the considerable violence included in talk shows such as *Jerry Springer*, we expected dispositional aggression to help distinguish television talk show preferences.

Anger

Anger also influences media behavior, and the degree of anger or hostility should affect preferences for and perceptions of media content. For example, in a series of studies, Gunter (1983, 1985) found that more-hostile people perceived depicted violence to be more humorous and exciting and were more tolerant of violence

conducted by others. Other research suggests that the link between exposure to media violence and viewer aggression might be present only in angered subjects (Berkowitz & Alioto, 1973). In her meta-analysis of studies on the effects of television on viewer aggression, Hearold (1986) found that viewer provocation—that is, anger—significantly increased the effect size. In an experiment, Scharrer (2001) found that exposure to violent and hypermasculine TV content led to increased reports of aggression and hostility. In light of this research linking anger or hostility and preferences for media violence, and the violent content contained in talk shows such as *Jerry Springer*, we expected unprovoked trait anger to help differentiate aggression levels and talk show preferences.

Attitudes Toward Women

Attitudes toward women influence media selection and perceptions. Some researchers have argued that sex and violence on television have led to the propagation of rape myths and desensitization of violence against women (Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams, 1989; Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988; Malamuth & Check, 1981). For example, Lanis and Covell (1995) found that males who were exposed to advertisements depicting women as sex objects exhibited increased sex-role stereotyping and rape myth beliefs. Such males were more likely to accept interpersonal violence against women than were men in a control condition. In addition, when examining how gangster rap music affects males' attitudes toward women, Wester, Crown, Quatman, and Heesacker (1997) argued that the music includes themes of sexual violence, normalizes antisocial behavior, and glorifies rape, abuse, and degradation of women. A. M. Rubin, West, and Mitchell (2001) found that people who listened to heavy-metal music exhibited more aggression and less regard for women than did individuals who preferred other music genres.

Sex and aggression have also been the principal subject matter of some television talk shows (Schlosser, 1997; Springer's Shows, 1998). Therefore, we expected disposition toward women to be a factor that discriminated among persons with high levels and persons with low levels of aggression and distinguished among preferred television talk shows and their hosts.

Unwillingness to Communicate

Individual dispositions, such as level of anxiety and sense of worth in communication encounters, also influence preferred modes of communication. For example, Finn (1997), found that people with higher levels of extroversion and

agreeableness preferred nonmediated channels, especially interpersonal conversation. People's dispositions about face-to-face interaction, as reflected in the unwillingness-to-communicate (UC) construct, also influence their media behavior. *Unwillingness to communicate* is a construct that represents "a chronic tendency to avoid and/or devalue oral communication" (Burgoon, 1976, p. 60). It contains an *approach–avoidance* dimension, representing a sense of introversion and anxiety, and a *reward* dimension, representing a sense of trust and whether others value your opinions.

The UC construct helps explain differences in communication behavior and media use. For example, Armstrong and Rubin (1989) found that telephoning a talk radio program provided a nonthreatening alternative to interpersonal communication for people who found less reward and were more anxious about face-to-face interaction. UC has been linked to media use and to dispositions such as anomie, alienation, introversion, and self-esteem (Burgoon, 1976). Because researchers have identified UC as an important factor leading to the use of talk radio and the Internet (e.g., Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000) as functional alternatives to unsatisfactory interpersonal interaction, we expected UC to help distinguish dispositional anger and aggression levels and preferences for different television talk shows.

TELEVISION-VIEWING FACTORS

Motivation

Uses and gratifications researchers have focused on individual differences people bring to the media experience and how these differences affect their communication motivation. Motivation is a key factor in uses and gratifications research, which is premised on the expectation that people actively "select media content for specific reasons" (Perse, 1994b, p. 493). Motivation influences media exposure, content selection, and, subsequently, media effects (Levy & Windahl, 1984; Perse, 1990a; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a, 1987b).

For instance, Greenberg (1974) found that watching to be aroused was linked to children's viewing of televised violence. Haridakis (2002) found that watching violent television shows to be entertained was linked to aggressive attitudes. Other researchers have found that people who seek excitement or arousal watch action–adventure programming and sports (A. M. Rubin, 1981, 1983), which are two program genres with considerable levels of violence and aggression. Greenberg (1975) also suggested that viewers' aggressive attitudes positively

relate to watching television "to forget personal problems" and "as a means of self-arousal" (p. 544).

Motivation and attitudes about the media have also been integral components of the previously mentioned ritualistic and instrumental media orientations, which suggest variable degrees of audience activeness (A. M. Rubin, 1984). These orientations have a bearing on media effects and have been linked to different outcomes such as relationship perceptions, information retention, and cultivation (e.g., Alexander, 1985; Garramone, 1983; Kim & Rubin, 1997). Compared with ritualistic media use, instrumental media use signifies greater involvement (Perse, 1990b; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a). A. M. Rubin and Step (1997) found that information and exciting-entertainment motivation (which both suggest an instrumental orientation) predicted affinity and involvement with, perceived realism of, and intent to watch television talk shows. Only information motivation predicted trust in the content. In this study, we considered how motivation differs for television talk programs and sought to link viewers' levels of aggression to their reasons for viewing, and their attitudes about, different television talk shows.

Attitudes

According to uses and gratifications research, viewers' attitudes also matter. *Television affinity*, or the felt importance of television in a person's life, and *perceived realism*, or how realistic a program is thought to be, mediate audience involvement and how people use and are affected by media content (e.g., Greenberg, 1974; A. M. Rubin, 1981, 1983; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a). Perceived realism can influence heuristic processing to make television exemplars more accessible (Busselle, 2001), increase the likelihood of perceptual responses to TV violence such as cultivation judgments (e.g., Potter, 1986; A. M. Rubin et al., 1988), and affect behavioral reactions such as imitating violence seen on television (Gunter, 1985; Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1993). We expected that, linked to attitudes such as affinity and realism, viewers' perceptions of the topics and emotions portrayed on talk shows would help differentiate their attraction to talk shows.

Parasocial Interaction

Relational aspects of television viewing are also important. As a form of affective, or emotional, involvement with the media, parasocial interaction (PSI) is an especially appropriate aspect to study when researchers are considering attraction to television talk shows and their hosts. When Horton and Wohl (1956) first articulated the concept of PSI, they referenced the talk show as a genre fostering such

interaction. Since then, television programs involving hosts have been popular subjects of PSI research (e.g., Auter & Moore, 1993; Grant, Guthrie, & Ball-Rokeach, 1991).

Parasocial interaction is a "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215). It provides opportunities to interact with personalities and to practice social roles. As such, a parasocial relationship has been compared with an interpersonal relationship. Both develop with time, as increased levels of exposure and perceived self-disclosure lead to a deeper sense of intimacy and liking of the other. As with interpersonal relationships, viewers believe they know the media persona as they do a friend. This belief is enhanced by the character's looks, speech characteristics, behavior, humor, emotional state, and nonverbal behavior (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991).

Applying uses and gratifications theory to this phenomenon, researchers have found PSI to reflect instrumental television use because viewers rely on the persona for guidance, consider the persona a friend, imagine being part of the persona's social world, and want to meet the persona (A. M. Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). PSI has been linked to intentional and selective viewing, greater attention when viewing, involvement with personae as cognitive guides, emotional involvement with newscasters and soap opera characters, and discussions about program content (Conway & Rubin, 1991; Kim & Rubin, 1997; Levy, 1979; Perse, 1990b; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a, 1987b). Perceived similarity, attitude homophily, and social and task attraction predict parasocial relationships, which develop in a pattern similar to the formation of interpersonal relationships (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Turner, 1993). In addition, parasocial relationships with radio talk show hosts influence listeners' subsequent attitudes and behavior (A. M. Rubin & Step, 2000).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Television talk shows have received considerable attention because of their aggressive content and confrontational style. We sought to examine what attracts viewers to these shows. Expectations from uses and gratifications research are that people are purposive and goal directed in their program preferences, and individual dispositions and attitudes mediate effects. Guided by these expectations, we sought to answer the following research question:

RQ1: How do aggression, anger, communication anxiety and reward, and attitudes toward women dispositions, talk show viewing motives and exposure,

affinity and realism attitudes, and the relationships, topics, and emotions portrayed on talk shows distinguish preferences for different television talk shows?

As mentioned previously, exposure to different content is variably linked to individual dispositions, motivation, selectivity, and activity (Hawkins et al., 2001). Owing to their personality, motivation, attitudes, emotions, and relationships (A. M. Rubin, 2002), people bring perceptual and selective filters to their media exposure (Bryant & Zillmann, 1984). Because the appeal of *Jerry Springer* focuses on relational confrontation and violence (Schlosser, 1997), we expected that persons who preferred *Jerry Springer* would be angrier and have more negative attitudes toward women compared with individuals who favored less confrontational shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Also, because a focus on content stresses more instrumental media use, we expected information viewing motivation and perceived realism to distinguish among persons who preferred different TV talk shows.

Although one assumption of uses and gratifications theory is that people purposively select communication to satisfy their needs and desires, the perspective also suggests that some, perhaps most, media effects are unintended (Katz et al., 1974). In light of the concern that aggressive television content can lead to unintended viewer aggression, we also sought to identify which individual dispositions and television-viewing factors will aid in distinguishing the aggression levels of talk show viewers:

RQ2: How do anger, communication anxiety and reward, and attitudes toward women dispositions, talk show viewing motives and exposure, viewer attitudes, and relationships, topics, and emotions portrayed on talk shows distinguish the aggression levels of talk show viewers?

Prior research suggests a link between anger and aggression (Berkowitz & Alioto, 1973; Hearold, 1986), aggression and arousing media fare (Hansen & Hansen, 1990), and aggression and acceptance of rape myths (Malamuth & Check, 1985). Other investigators have also found links between exposure to violent and hypermasculine television content and aggression (Scharrer, 2001). In addition, people who feel devalued or find less UC reward in their interpersonal relationships feel alienated (Burgoon, 1976) and could feel frustrated and act with greater hostility and more aggressively toward others. On the basis of such past research, we expected anger, negative attitudes toward women, negative UC reward, arousal viewing motivation, and exposure to TV talk shows such as *Jerry Springer* to help explain higher levels of aggression.

METHOD

Across two academic semesters, 354 undergraduate students enrolled in a required liberal education communication class at a large Midwestern university provided usable data. Data were collected in two sessions each semester, which separated most dispositional measures from television-viewing measures by about 4 weeks. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants received research credits for the class. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 49 years (M = 19.94, SD = 3.13); women composed 64.4% of the sample.

Individual Dispositional Measures

Aggression. We used the 10-item Assault subscale of the Buss–Durkee Hostility Inventory (BDHI) to assess disposition toward resorting to "physical violence against others" (Buss & Durkee, 1957, p. 343; e.g., "Once in a while I cannot control my urge to harm others," "If I have to resort to physical violence to defend my rights, I will," and "I have known people who have pushed me so far that we came to blows"). The BDHI is one of the most cited measures of aggression in the social sciences (Buss & Perry, 1992). Participants indicated whether they thought each statement was 1 (*false*) or 2 (*true*). We averaged scores on the 10 items (M = 1.38, SD = 0.24, Cronbach's α = .72); higher scores reflected more aggression. We also divided participants into groups so that we could compare *low* mean scores (1.00 to 1.20, n = 120), *moderate* mean scores (1.21 to 1.59, n = 146), and *high* mean aggressive scores (1.60 to 2.00, n = 88) for other dispositional and television-viewing variables.

Anger. So that we could assess a disposition and intensity of feeling irritated, we asked participants to complete the 12 items of the General Anger subscale of Siegel's (1985) Multidimensional Anger Inventory (e.g., "I tend to get angry more frequently than other people," "It is easy to make me angry," and "Something makes me angry almost every day"). Response options ranged from 1 (*completely undescriptive of me*) to 5 (*completely descriptive of me*); higher scores reflected more anger. We deleted two items to improve the reliability of the measure and averaged scores for the remaining 10 items (M = 2.33, SD = 0.79, Cronbach's α = .88).

Unwillingness to communicate. To assess a sense of communication anxiety and trust, we asked participants to complete Burgoon's (1976) 20-item unwillingness-to-communicate (UC) scale. The measure has two dimensions:

approach–avoidance (avoid) and reward. High UC avoid scores meant that participants were anxious or fearful about face-to-face interaction (e.g., "I am afraid to speak up in conversations," "I feel nervous when I have to speak to others," and "I am afraid to express myself in a group"). High UC reward scores meant that participants felt valued and trusted by their family and friends (e.g., "I think my friends are truthful with me," "My friends and family listen to my ideas and suggestions," and "My friends seek my opinions and advice"). We used a 5-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and averaged responses to the 10 items of each dimension. The UC avoid mean was 2.61 (SD = 0.72, Cronbach's α = .86). The UC reward mean was 3.94 (SD = 0.57, Cronbach's α = .82).

Attitudes toward women. We used Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp's (1973) 25-item Attitudes Toward Women Scale to assess participants' beliefs about roles, responsibilities, and equal rights of women (e.g., "Women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers," "Women should be concerned with their duties of childbearing and housetending, rather than with their desires for professional and business careers," and "The intellectual leaderships of a community should be largely in the hands of men"). The scale is intended to gauge attitudes about "responsibilities, privileges, and behaviors in a variety of spheres that have traditionally been divided along gender lines but could, in principle, be shared equally by men and women" (Spence & Hahn, 1997, p. 18). Because some items were dated, we shortened the scale to 20 items by means of reliability analysis. We used a 5-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We recoded negative items so that higher scores meant more positive regard for women, and we averaged responses to the 20 items (M = 3.99, SD = 0.62, Cronbach's α = .89). This background measure was the only one included at the end of the second data-gathering sessions.

Television-Viewing Measures

Viewing preferences. All television-viewing data were gathered during the second session each semester. We initially asked participants to identify, from a list of eight programs and an "other" category, the daytime television talk *program* they preferred to watch most often. The programs that participants preferred were *Jerry Springer* (47.6%), *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (24.6%), *Montel* (6.5%), *Jenny Jones* (5.9%), *Sally Jesse Raphael* (3.1%), *Ricki Lake* (1.4%), *Maury* (0.3%), and *other* (10.5%). We selected these eight shows because they were daytime talk, rather than hybrid talk–variety, programs; had been on the air a reasonable length

of time; had received high Nielsen ratings (Greenberg et al., 1997); and were popular among college students. *Jerry Springer* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* were clearly the most preferred talk shows, combined accounting for more than 72% of all responses. We used this measure to compare differences among viewers with different preferred talk shows that had received at least 5% of the mentions (remaining responses were categorized as "other").

Participants also reported the *duration* and *frequency* of their viewing. They watched their preferred daytime talk program for an average of 3.40 years (*SD* = 2.38) and watched that program an average of 3.20 times (*SD* = 1.71) during a typical week.

After asking a series of questions about exposure, motives, attitudes, topics, and emotions experienced when watching the preferred programs, we also asked participants to identify the daytime television talk show host they preferred to watch, again from a list of eight hosts (to align with earlier program choices) and an "other" category. The hosts that participants preferred were Jerry Springer (37.1%), Oprah Winfrey (28.6%), Montel Williams (9.1%), Jenny Jones (5.9%), Sally Jesse Raphael (4.2%), Ricki Lake (3.1%), Maury Povich (1.1%), and other (10.8%).

Viewing motivation. We presented participants with 27 reasons for watching their preferred daytime television talk program ("I watch my preferred talk TV program…") and asked them to indicate how much each reason was like their own reasons for watching the program, on a scale of 1 (*not at all)* to 5 (*exactly*). The 27 statements represented nine a priori viewing motive categories (Greenberg, 1974; A. M. Rubin, 1981, 1983). Consistent with uses and gratifications research in which these items have been factor analyzed to uncover the latent motive structure, we used principal– components analysis with varimax rotation to extract the viewing motive factors (e.g., Perse, 1994a; A. M. Rubin, 1983). To retain a factor, we expected an eigenvalue of at least 1.0 and at least two items meeting a 60–40 loading criterion. We averaged responses to the retained items for each factor. The analysis revealed seven factors explaining 63.5% of the variance.

Factor 1, *Exciting Entertainment* (eigenvalue = 3.39, variance = 12.5% after rotation), contained three entertainment items ("because it's enjoyable," "because it entertains me," "because it amuses me"), two arousal items ("because it's exciting," "because it's thrilling"), and one habit item ("because I just like to watch"). Factor 1 had the highest mean of 3.59 (*SD* = 0.78, Cronbach's α = .81). Factor 2, *Pass Time–Habit* (eigenvalue = 2.85, variance = 10.5%), included three pass-time items ("because it passes the time away, particularly when I'm bored," "because it gives me something to do to occupy my time," "when I have nothing better to do") and two habit items ("just because it's there," "because it's a habit, just something

I do"). Factor 2 had the second highest mean of 3.07 (*SD* = 0.77, Cronbach's α = .77). Factor 3, *Information* (eigenvalue = 2.55, variance = 9.4%), contained three information items ("because it helps me learn about myself and others," "so I could learn what could happen to me," "so I can learn how to do things which I haven't done before"). Factor 3 had the second lowest mean of 2.19 (*SD* = 1.01, Cronbach's α = .81). Factor 4, *Companionship* (eigenvalue = 2.43, variance = 9.0%), had three companionship items ("because it makes me feel less lonely," "so I won't have to be alone," "when there's no one else to talk to or be with") and one escape item ("so I can get away from the rest of the family or others"). Factor 4 had the lowest mean of 2.06 (*SD* = 0.73, Cronbach's α = .75). Factor 5, *Relaxation* (eigenvalue = 2.33, variance = 8.6%), contained three relaxation items ("because it relaxes me," "because it allows me to unwind," "because it's a pleasant rest"). Factor 5 shared the third highest mean of 2.80 (*SD* = 0.85, Cronbach's α = .76). Factor 6, *Escape* (eigenvalue = 1.91, variance = 7.1%), included two escape items ("so I can forget about school, work, or other things," "so I can get away from what I'm doing"). Factor 6 also shared the third highest mean of 2.80 (*SD* = 0.99, Cronbach's α = .67). Factor 7, *Social Interaction* (eigenvalue = 1.70, variance = 6.3%), contained three social interaction items ("because it's something to do when friends come over," "so I can be with members of the family or friends who are watching," "so I can talk with other people about what's on"). The loading of the third item was less than the 60–40 criterion, but including this item made conceptual sense and doing so increased the reliability. Factor 7 had the third lowest mean of 2.40 (*SD* = 0.83, Cronbach's α = .60).

Talk show attitudes. We asked participants about two specific attitudes toward preferred TV talk shows (A. M. Rubin, 1981, 1983; A. M. Rubin et al., 1985). We asked about their affinity with the program, or how important it was to watch the program: "Watching that program is one of the more important things I do each day"; "Whenever I am unable to watch that program, I really miss it"; "Watching the program is important to me"; "I would feel lost without that program to watch"; and "When it's on, I would rather watch that program than do anything else."

We also asked about the program's perceived realism, or how realistic they thought the program was: "That program presents things as they really are in life"; "If I see something on that program, I can be sure it really is that way"; "That program lets me see how other people live"; "That program shows me life as it really is"; "That program lets me see what happens to other people as if I were really there"; and "That program helps me understand some of the problems other people have."

Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with the statements representing each dimension; we averaged responses to the items

for each attitude. The five-item Affinity scale (M = 1.94, SD = 0.67, Cronbach's α = .80) suggested a low level of felt importance of watching the program. The six-item Perceived Realism scale (M = 2.61, SD = 0.90, Cronbach's α = .88) suggested a modest to moderate sense of realism.

Attitudes toward talk show topics. We asked participants to indicate their agreement, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with whether they enjoyed watching certain topics on talk shows ("I enjoy watching topics on TV talk shows about…"). Topics reflected those identified in earlier research (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1997; A. M. Rubin & Step, 1997): celebrities, families, health (e.g., sickness, dieting, cures), makeovers, relationships (e.g., affairs, matchmaking, sex), secrets, and social issues (e.g., crime, racism, prostitution). Because this measure was new, we subjected responses to principal–components analysis with varimax rotation to determine talk show topics. To retain a factor, we expected an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more and at least two items meeting a 60–40 loading criterion. We averaged responses to the retained items for each factor. Two factors emerged, explaining 56.6% of the variance.

Factor 1, *People Topics* (eigenvalue = 1.99, variance = 28.4%), included four topics: health (e.g., sickness, dieting, cures), families, celebrities, and makeovers. The loading of the fourth topic was slightly less than the 60–40 criterion, but this topic fit with the other topics and increased the reliability. Factor 1 had a mean of 3.37 (SD = 0.81, Cronbach's α = .62). Factor 2, *Voyeuristic Topics* (eigenvalue = 1.97, variance = 28.2%), included two topics: relationships (e.g., affairs, matchmaking, sex) and secrets. Compared with Factor 1, Factor 2 focused more on the sordid and scandalous. It had a mean of 3.63 (SD = 1.10, Cronbach's α = .81). We also retained *social issues* (M = 3.49, SD = 1.13) as a topic that did not load cleanly on either factor.

Attitudes toward emotions portrayed. We then asked participants to indicate their agreement, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with whether they enjoyed watching guests experience certain emotions when they appeared on television talk shows ("I enjoy watching guests on TV talk shows…"). The emotions were as follows: be angry, be aroused or excited, be embarrassed or humiliated, be happy, be pained or hurt, be sad, be shocked, and be surprised. Because this measure was also new, we subjected responses to principal–components analysis with varimax rotation to determine talk show emotions. To retain a factor, we expected an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more and at least two items meeting a 60–40 loading criterion. We averaged responses to the retained items for each factor. Two factors emerged, explaining 63.1% of the variance.

Factor 1, *Shock Emotions* (eigenvalue = 2.69, variance = 33.7%), included three emotions: shocked, surprised, and aroused or excited. Factor 1 had a mean of 3.72 (SD = 0.86, Cronbach's α = .74). Factor 2, *Hurt Emotions* (eigenvalue = 2.36, variance = 29.4%), included two emotions: pained or hurt, and sad. Factor 2 had a mean of 2.30 (SD = 1.05, Cronbach's α = .79). We also retained *angry* (M = 3.21, SD = 1.24), *happy* (M = 3.93, SD = 1.06), and *embarrassed* (M = 2.76, SD = 1.31) as emotions that did not load cleanly on either factor.

Parasocial interaction. We used A. M. Rubin et al.'s (1985) 20-item PSI Scale to assess the sense of relationship participants felt with their favorite television talk show host. We adapted the items on the PSI Scale to reflect a sense of friendship, liking, empathy, and attraction for the favorite talk show host—for example: "The host makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends"; "I see the host as a natural, down-to-earth person"; "I like to compare my ideas with what the host says"; "I feel sorry for the host when he or she makes a mistake"; "I look forward to watching the host on the next show"; "I miss seeing the host when the show isn't on"; and "I find the host to be attractive." We used a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and averaged responses to the 20 items. The PSI Scale had a mean of 2.84 (SD = 0.63, Cronbach's α = .89).

Analysis

Following use of the factor and reliability analyses to create the measures, we used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine, initially, which individual dispositional and television-viewing measures differed, first, on the basis of participants' preferred talk shows, and, second, on the basis of their levels of aggression. The measures that at a minimum approached statistical significance were included in two separate discriminant analyses so that we could examine how dispositional and television-viewing factors helped explain (a) attraction to or preference for different daytime television talk shows (RQ1), and (b) differences in dispositional aggression (RQ2).

RESULTS

Research Question 1

The first research question asked how dispositional and television-viewing factors distinguished TV talk show preferences. We expected that persons who prefer

Jerry Springer would be angrier and have more negative attitudes toward women compared with individuals who favor shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. We also expected information viewing motivation and perceived realism to distinguish among persons who preferred different talk shows.

The initial ANOVAs revealed significant differences among preferred talk shows on the following: attitudes toward women; UC reward; gender; information, relaxation, exciting-entertainment, and pass time–habit viewing motivation; perceived realism; viewing duration; PSI; enjoyment of guests' angry, embarrassed, shock, and hurt emotions; and enjoyment of voyeuristic, people, and social issue topics. We included these constructs in the discriminant analysis for RQ1, seeking to explain differences among viewers who preferred *Jerry Springer, The Oprah Winfrey Show, Montel, Jenny Jones,* and other talk shows.

The results of the first discriminant analysis were significant. They are summarized in Table 1. We were able to distinguish among persons who preferred different talk shows, most notably *Jerry Springer* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show,* on the basis of the included dispositional and television-viewing constructs. The most sizable discriminators were perceived realism of the program, information viewing motivation, enjoying guests become angry and embarrassed or humiliated, and gender.

Whereby we would expect 20% of the cases to be classified correctly as a result of chance on the basis of the five categories of shows, the analysis classified 57.3% of the cases correctly. The percentage was 66.1% for *Jerry Springer*. The analysis produced three significant discriminant functions, the first of which explained 82.9% of the variance. Because Functions 2 and 3 each explained less than 10% residual variance, we focus only on Function 1.

The data in Table 1 suggest discrete differences among persons who preferred different talk shows. Most of these differences were between people who preferred *Jerry Springer* and those who preferred *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (and *Montel*, to a lesser extent). Compared with people who preferred *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, those who preferred to watch *Jerry Springer* perceived the show to be less realistic and enjoyed watching the guests become angry. They also enjoyed watching voyeuristic topics about affairs, sex, and secrets and watching guests be embarrassed or humiliated, shocked or aroused, and hurt or pained.

Conversely, compared with viewers who preferred *Jerry Springer*, women were more likely to prefer *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (and *Montel*). They watched *The Oprah Winfrey Show* primarily for information reasons—to learn about themselves and what might happen to them. They watched their preferred talk shows for a longer period, found them to be more realistic, and developed a parasocial relationship with their favorite host. They felt comfortable with Oprah Winfrey as they would a friend and found her to be a natural, down-to-earth person. They enjoyed

TABLE 1
Discriminant Analysis of Television Talk Show Viewers

	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
Summary Statistics			
Canonical Correlation	.74	.36	.32
Eigenvalue	1.23	.15	.12
Variance Explained	82.9%	9.6%	7.5%
Wilks's Lambda	.34[a]	.75[b]	.86[c]
Discriminant Function Coefficients			
Perceived Realism	.59	.46	–.17
Angry Emotion	–.55	.37	.08
Information Motivation	.50	.55	.23
Embarrassed/Humiliated Emotion	–.37	.32	.19
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	.37	–.44	.29
Voyeuristic Topics	–.32	.30	.37
Parasocial Interaction	.32	.18	–.05
Shock/Aroused Emotions	–.28	.29	.33
Viewing Duration	.26	.38	.37
People Topics	.25	–.02	.18
Hurt/Pained Emotions	–.21	.16	–.07
Relaxation Motivation	.19	–.16	.03
Attitudes Toward Women	.19	–.12	–.18
Exciting–Entertainment Motivation	–.18	.25	.01
Pass Time–Habit Motivation	–.12	–.28	.25
Social Issue Topics	–.05	.34	.07
UC Reward	.04	–.24	.41
Discriminant Function Group Centroids			
Jerry Springer	–1.05	.15	.02
Jenny Jones	.14	–.55	.79
Other Hosts	.29	–.76	–.21
Montel Williams	.86	.18	–.98
Oprah Winfrey	1.58	.27	.17

(*continued*)

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)

Classification Results					
	Predicted Group Membership (%)				
Original Group Membership	Jenny Jones	Jerry Springer	Montel Williams	Oprah Winfrey	Other Shows
Jenny Jones (n = 21)	47.6	19.0	4.8	9.5	19.0
Jerry Springer (n = 168)	17.9	66.1	3.6	3.6	8.9
Montel Williams (n = 23)	4.3	4.3	56.5	21.7	13.0
Oprah Winfrey (n = 87)	16.1	1.1	14.9	55.2	12.6
Other Shows (n = 55)	16.4	20.0	14.5	10.9	38.2
Original Grouped Cases Correctly Classified: 57.3%					

[a]$\chi^2 = 367.61$ (68, $N = 353$), $p < .001$. [b]$\chi^2 = 96.10$ (48, $N = 353$), $p < .001$. [c]$\chi^2 = 50.71$ (30, $N = 353$), $p = .01$.

watching people-oriented topics about celebrities, family, health, and makeovers and had more favorable attitudes toward women.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked how dispositional and television-viewing factors distinguished participants' levels of aggression. We expected anger, negative attitudes toward women, negative UC reward, arousal viewing motivation, and exposure to TV talk shows such as *Jerry Springer* to explain increased aggression.

The initial ANOVAs yielded significant differences among people with high, moderate, and low levels of aggression with regard to the following: anger, attitudes toward women, UC reward, social interaction and escape viewing motivations, and enjoyment of guests' embarrassed, angry, shocked, hurt, and happy emotions. Gender and viewing frequency approached significance. We included these constructs in the discriminant analysis for RQ2, seeking to identify differences among the participants' levels of aggression.

The results of the second discriminant analysis were also significant. They are summarized in Table 2. We were able to distinguish among levels of aggression, especially between persons with high aggression levels and persons with low aggression levels, on the basis of the included dispositional and television-viewing constructs. The most sizable discriminators were anger, attitudes toward women, and enjoyment of watching guests become embarrassed or humiliated.

TABLE 2
Discriminant Analysis of Aggressive Dispositions of Talk Show Viewers

	Function 1	Function 2
Summary Statistics		
Canonical Correlation	.48	.27
Eigenvalue	.29	.08
Variance Explained	78.4%	21.6%
Wilks's Lambda	.72[a]	.93[b]
Discriminant Function Coefficients		
Anger	.77	–.03
Attitudes Toward Women	–.45	–.03
Embarrassed/Humiliated Emotion	.34	.18
Angry Emotion	.28	.46
UC–Reward	–.28	–.01
Social Interaction Motivation	.27	–.48
Shock/Aroused Emotions	.27	.34
Hurt/Pained Emotion	.26	.13
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	–.24	–.04
Viewing Frequency	.22	.07
Happy Emotion	–.16	.40
Escape Motivation	.08	–.45
Discriminant Function Group Centroids		
Low Aggression	–.51	–.29
Moderate Aggression	–.11	.33
High Aggression	.89	–.16
Classification Results		

	Predicted Group Membership (%)		
Original Group Membership	Low Aggression	Moderate Aggression	High Aggression
Low Aggression (n = 120)	60.8	21.7	17.5
Moderate Aggression (n = 146)	30.8	50.7	18.5
High Aggression (n = 88)	14.8	18.2	67.0
Original Grouped Cases Correctly Classified: 58.2%			

[a]$\chi^2(24, N=354) = 115.15, p < .001$. [b]$\chi^2(11, N=354) = 26.24, p < .01$.

Whereby we would expect 33.3% of the cases to be classified correctly as a result of chance on the basis of the three levels of aggression examined, the analysis classified 58.2% of the cases correctly. It produced two significant discriminant functions, the first of which explained 78.4% of the variance. Because the residual variance explained in Function 2 was more marginal, and the Wilks's lambda much weaker, we focus only on Function 1.

The data describing Function 1 suggest that, in particular, compared with persons with low aggression levels (and those with moderate aggression levels, to a lesser extent), persons who were highly aggressive felt more anger and had less regard for the rights and equality of women. In addition, they enjoyed watching talk show guests be embarrassed or humiliated, angry, shocked or aroused, and hurt or pained. Persons who were highly aggressive, particularly males, also tended to feel less valued in their interpersonal interactions and to watch TV talk shows more often, especially to interact with friends or family members who were watching.

DISCUSSION

Given the popularity of television talk shows and criticism of their content, researchers have sought to understand possible negative effects associated with exposure to these shows (e.g., Davis & Mares, 1998; Rossler & Brosius, 2001). Uses and gratifications research has shown that a host of viewer characteristics influence these potential effects (A. M. Rubin, 2002). Therefore, we sought to investigate how relevant dispositional factors—namely, aggression, anger, attitudes toward women, and unwillingness to communicate—and television-viewing factors—namely, viewing motivation, attitudes, relationships, emotions, and topics—could explain differences in preferences for or attachment to different TV talk shows. We examined two research questions.

With the first research question, we sought to consider how dispositional and television-viewing factors distinguished among persons who preferred different talk shows. The findings demonstrate clear differences among individuals who preferred different programs of this genre. Such findings raise the question of whether talk shows should be classified as a singular programming form.

The most significant and substantial distinction revealed was between persons who preferred *Jerry Springer* and those who preferred *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Although not classified as being significantly more angry or aggressive, *Jerry Springer* fans displayed characteristics similar to those of the individuals who were highly aggressive in the sample. In particular, they enjoyed watching guests on the program be angry, embarrassed or humiliated, shocked or aroused, and hurt

or pained. Consistent with this expression of emotions, *Jerry Springer* fans also enjoyed watching voyeuristic topics such as those about sex, affairs, and secrets, and they had somewhat more negative attitudes toward women. They were motivated to watch to be amused and excited or aroused.

In contrast to the *Jerry Springer* viewers were *The Oprah Winfrey Show* fans. These participants were more often women who were interested in topics about people, celebrities, and the like. They had watched the program for a longer period, developed a parasocial relationship with the host, and were motivated to watch to seek information, which they perceived to be realistic.

Clearly, the portraits of viewers of these programs suggest that different content features attract different viewers even of the same genre. These profiles support the notion of uses and gratifications theory that viewers select content on the basis of defining features such as personality, motivation, attitudes, emotions, and relationships. Consistent with the suppositions of the uses and gratifications perspective is the finding that the media satisfy a variety of needs that emanate from social roles and psychological dispositions (Katz et al., 1973). Understanding preferences for TV talk shows and their hosts requires understanding such viewer differences. Such preferences are differentially linked to dispositions, motivation, and selectivity (Hawkins et al., 2001) and lead to possible outcomes or consequences of exposure.

With the second research question, we sought to examine how dispositional and television-viewing factors distinguished among levels of aggression. Our analysis revealed two primary (and several other) discriminators of aggression levels. First, consistent with research suggesting that frustration and provocation cause aggression (e.g., Berkowitz & Alioto, 1973; Hearold, 1986), our finding was that dispositional anger was the most salient discriminator, especially between persons who exhibited high aggression levels and those who exhibited low aggression levels. Perhaps supporting the link between aggression and more negative attitudes toward women, another finding was that individuals with low levels of aggression also had a higher regard for the roles, rights, and responsibilities of women than did those who were highly aggressive. In addition, those with low aggression levels had a more positive regard for their own interpersonal interactions with others, feeling more valued and finding greater trust in these interactions than did persons who were highly aggressive. This finding suggests that highly aggressive individuals, not finding as much reward or value in their interpersonal encounters, might seek functional alternatives, perhaps in the media, to substitute for their less than satisfactory face-to-face interaction. This finding is consistent with previous findings that people sometimes use mediated channels for such compensation (e.g., Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1985).

The notion of *functional alternatives* is based on the premise that "needs and interests normally may be satisfied in more than one way, and different habits, practices, and acts can fulfill the same function for the same individuals" (Windahl, Hojerback, & Hedinsson, 1986, p. 48). The choice of an alternative depends on its availability, degree of perceived familiarity and instrumentality, degree of social and cultural acceptance (Windahl et al., 1986), and individual characteristics such as sensation seeking (e.g., Krcmar & Greene, 1999). Research suggests that people who are lonely or find reduced satisfaction in their face-to-face encounters may seek an alternative means of communicating (e.g., Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Perse & Rubin, 1990). Some TV talk shows such as *Jerry Springer* may provide such an alternative for people who feel devalued in their interpersonal relationships.

The second discriminant analysis suggests several trends in this regard. First, highly aggressive people watched their preferred talk shows more often each week than did persons with low levels of aggression. Second, highly aggressive people had a reduced sense that others valued their opinions and thought that others were less than honest with them when they interacted. Third, the communication encounter with the talk show could be described as something less than functional. Highly aggressive individuals, especially males who sought to watch talk shows to interact with others, enjoyed witnessing talk show guests under less than amiable conditions. They enjoyed watching guests be embarrassed or humiliated, angry, shocked or aroused, and hurt or pained.

Thus, people who are angry and aggressive might turn to confrontational TV talk programs as an alternative to unsatisfying interpersonal interaction and have this aggressive disposition nurtured by a steady diet of such content, which could be described as less than socially desirable. Alternativily, perhaps watching such content with others has a cathartic effect. This latter possibility is consistent with research findings supporting the idea that exposure to televised content, including exciting fare, influences or manages moods (Bryant & Zillmann, 1984; Medoff, 1982; Zillmann, Hezel, & Medoff, 1980). Watching others in less than satisfying interpersonal interactions may make these viewers feel better about their own situation. Such relationships require further examination. Our results suggest that more refinement of the concept of a functional alternative is needed so that we can be more confident of ascertaining when alternative channel or content choice has functional or dysfunctional consequences.

Implications of Findings for Future Research

Previous research provided evidence that people make conscious choices in their use of talk media. For example, Avery, Ellis, and Glover (1978), found that

different radio talk show hosts satisfied a variety of interpersonal needs for callers. They found that talk radio callers were attracted to different hosts according to their perceptions of the hosts. Participants in our study also sought certain kinds of content and hosts. They were motivated by different needs or wants to view different programs.

Although the findings suggest participants were somewhat cognitively and emotionally involved in the viewing, clear distinctions based on instrumental media use were evident. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* viewers sought informative, realistically perceived content, mostly focusing on celebrities and families, and a parasocial relationship with the host. *Jerry Springer* viewers enjoyed watching guests be angered, embarrassed, shocked, and hurt. Possibly, these people, who also had a lower regard for women, may seek confirmation for their attitudes from Springer and his talk show.

One important finding was that although media effects have been linked to more realistically perceived content and instrumental-viewing orientations (A. M. Rubin, 1998, 2002), *Jerry Springer* viewers do not watch to seek information, regard the voyeuristic content they prefer to be too realistic, or develop a strong bond with the host. They do not seem to take the viewing experience too seriously. *Jerry Springer* viewers watch out of curiosity, for amusement, for titillation, and as a way to feel better about themselves, even owing to others' misfortunes. They watch for diversion and arousal, and they enjoy witnessing others' emotional and relational traumas, perhaps in a manner similar to how viewers enjoy watching such genres as soap operas and professional wrestling.

Recent research suggests that instrumental use of talk shows, including the development of parasocial relationships, can lead to more pronounced effects on audience members because it connotes stronger involvement with the content or message (A. M. Rubin & Step, 2000). What we did not study was whether the voyeuristic enjoyment of the guests' negative emotions fostered viewers to come away from the show with a greater liking or propensity to anger, embarrass, shock, or hurt people in their own interpersonal worlds. Future research should examine other influences, such as changes in or confirmation of attitudes, and effects on aggressive versus prosocial behavior that viewers may learn from the hosts.

The analysis supported the premise that anger effectively discriminates between individuals with high aggression levels and those with low aggression levels. However, anger and aggression did not effectively discriminate among talk show preferences. The aggression measure may have lacked variability as a result of the nature of the sample. Also, the Buss–Perry (1992) Aggression Questionnaire update of the 1957 BDHI may have been a better choice of measures. Researchers should also consider whether the profiles discovered are applicable to a broader sample and to one that provides a better gender balance. The college-age

sample might adequately represent the *Jerry Springer* audience, but this may not be the case for audiences of other talk shows.

Because ascertaining media effects is a complex process involving individual differences and choices, uses and gratifications theory may not offer the most parsimonious explanation. Our findings, when added to those of studies of the links between aggression and selection of violent content, suggest that several factors affect attraction to such content. Some of these factors—especially, anger, attitudes toward women, and enjoyment of guests' embarrassed emotional states—distinguished between higher and lower levels of dispositional aggression. Other factors—especially perceived realism, enjoyment of guests' angry emotional states, and information-seeking motivation—distinguished among preferences for TV talk shows. Anther possibility is that relations between dispositional aggression and other variables could be linked through other factors (e.g., political ideology) not measured in our study or that are unique to the sample. We need to continue examining the direct and indirect relationships of such factors to explain attraction to media content that depicts violence or aggression and the effects of exposure to such content.

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