Is Watching Others Self-Disclose Enjoyable?

An Examination of the Effects of Information Delivery in Entertainment Media

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Abstract. Self-disclosure is a means through which closeness, familiarity, and satisfaction are produced between partners. The present study integrated interpersonal and mass communication literature to theoretically inform the outcomes of mediated forms of self-disclosure between a viewer and character on television. Empirically testing the effects of two dimensions of disclosure – depth (low intimacy versus high intimacy) and mode (character-to-viewer versus character-to-character versus narrator-to-viewer) of information delivery – this research supported the prediction that a viewer's overall enjoyment of witnessing a character self-disclose personal information would be mediated by identification and transportation. The results suggest the meaningful role of "character address" in heightening audience engagement with both the character and narrative. Implications for the similarity of interpersonal and mediated relationships, effective entertainment formats, social reality perceptions, and online self-disclosure are discussed.

Keywords: media entertainment, self-disclosure, enjoyment, identification, transportation

Self-disclosure, or the process of making the self known to others, is often described as the means through which personal information becomes shared knowledge (Cozby, 1973; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Wheeless, 1978; Wheeless & Grotz, 1976). Research in psychology and interpersonal communication has demonstrated the importance of self-disclosure in relation to a number of motivations and outcomes (e.g., Fehr, 1996, 1999; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Sanderson & Cantor, 2001) and benefits and costs (e.g., Alberts, Yoshimura, Rabby, & Loschiavo, 2005; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Rawlins, 1992). While self-disclosure has received substantial attention in the context of dyadic interactions – holding implications for relational closeness, sustainability, and satisfaction – scholars have yet to fully bridge the fields of interpersonal and mass communication to examine how personal information exchange operates in the entertainment landscape.

Clearly, one way viewers learn about characters is by observing them divulge intimate thoughts, feelings, and/or prior experiences (Andrejevic, 2002; Good, Porter, & Dillon, 2002; Haag, 1993; Priest & Dominick, 1994). A wealth of empirical evidence supports the impact of depth of disclosure on relationship satisfaction, particularly when individuals transition from disclosing peripheral or less intimate information (e.g., age, hometown, and occupation) to core or more intimate information (e.g., beliefs, needs, and fears) (see Altman & Taylor, 1973). In the case of entertainment media, the act of self-disclosure is particularly distinguished by its mode of information delivery. The most customary forms of self-disclosure occur when characters reveal personal information through conversation. However, during the past decade with the influx of reality-based programs, the frequency of private information being disclosed directly to the audience has increased with the use of "confessionals" (e.g., MTV's *The Real World*, CBS's *Survivor*, and Fox's *American Idol*) (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Dovey, 2000; Gamson, 1998; Grindstaff, 1997; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994; Shattuc, 1997; White, 1992, 2002).

Literature on character involvement may help to inform why relationships with media figures are psychologically gratifying. In particular, individuals may develop pseudo-friendships with media characters or parasocial relationships that are seen as intimate (Horton & Wohl, 1956), socially attractive (Perse & Rubin, 1989), and functionally effective at fulfilling interpersonal needs (Nordlund, 1978). In addition, considerable theorizing among entertainment

scholars has resulted in a deeper understanding that character perceptions foster program enjoyment via a number of processes, such as identification (Cohen, 2006; Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004) and transportation (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Such effects further buttress the value of investigating viewers' responses to media characters, particularly as the disclosure of intimate information is a prominent feature of entertainment programs.

Therefore, the present research uniquely synthesized interpersonal and mass communication scholarship to theoretically examine how mediated self-disclosure plays a substantive role in predicting the enjoyment of media fare. With the proliferation of character-to-viewer self-disclosure formats, the need to delineate their impact becomes even more pertinent in light of the current media climate. Specifically, we tested a proposed model that accounts for a number of mediating processes (identification, uncertainty reduction, and transportation), suggesting ways in which self-disclosure elicits enjoyment among audiences.

Self-Disclosure in Entertainment Media

The portrayal of self-disclosure in entertainment media is not a new phenomenon. Across news programs, talk shows, situational comedies, soap operas, dramas, testimonials, sports games, etc., viewers commonly see anchors, characters, celebrities, and sports announcers reveal their personal thoughts and feelings on camera. More recently in the last decade, self-disclosure has been found in more innovative production formats. With the diverse assortment of reality-based programs dominating broadcasting and cable television lineups, self-disclosure has become even more visible (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994; Lunt & Stenner, 2005; Masciarotte, 1991; Scannel, 2002; Shattuc, 1997; White, 1992). Nabi, Biely, Morgan, and Stitt (2003) defined such shows as consisting of the following qualities: "1) people portraying themselves (e.g., not actors or public figures performing roles), 2) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set, 3) without a script, 4) with events placed in a narrative context, and 5) for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment" (p. 304). Hill (2005) emphasized that these programs present the lives and events of people as they unfold and happen in front of a camera. These surveillance-based reality programs encourage acts of self-disclosure and personal expression, facilitating people to actively take part in the public discourse (Andrejevic, 2002). Shows, such as *The Real World* and *Big Brother*, allow individuals to become instant celebrities and equate "self-disclosure with freedom and authenticity" (Andrejevic, 2002, p. 268).

Due to these characteristics of the reality television genre, it is evident that self-disclosure is a necessary area of exploration, particularly with regard to its impact on audience engagement. Exemplified in interviews with contestants during tribal council in *Survivor*, with potential suitors before a rose ceremony in the *Bachelor*, or with singers auditioning for *The X-Factor*, self-disclosure is an integral part of the premise of these shows. In addition, the "confessional" is a distinguishing feature across many of these programs in which characters reveal private thoughts and feelings directly to the camera (or audience) (see Aslama & Pantti, 2006). Even situational sitcoms such as *The Office* adopted this format in an office setting, where employees disclose their opinions about each other and their boss to viewers. Taking into consideration the pervasive and creative representations of self-disclosure in entertainment programs, how does the audience respond to such information exchange? To explore this inquiry, we draw from both interpersonal and mass communication literatures to (1) discuss how depth and mode of information delivery are associated with feelings of pleasure, and (2) theorize how these two factors predict the enjoyment of media fare via various mediating processes.

Depth and Mode of Information Delivery Associated With Enjoyment

Although self-disclosure can produce a number of benefits, research on dyadic relationships has shown strong support for its effects on relational closeness (Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Greenspan, 1987; Fehr, 1996, 1999; Rawlins, 1992; Reis & Shaver, 1988). In particular, a wealth of empirical evidence points to the positive association between intimacy and satisfaction (Sanderson, Rahm, & Beigbeder, 2005). While individuals with a focus on intimacy show a greater tendency to engage in self-disclosure and social support (see Sanderson & Evans, 2001), the reverse has also been found such that self-disclosure fosters intimacy, liking, and relationship satisfaction (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997; Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Sprecher & Duck, 1994). Earlier theorizing of the self-disclosure process in a dyadic interaction emphasized the important role of *depth*, suggesting that intimacy increases so long as people self-disclose, also referred to as "social penetration" (Altman & Taylor, 1973). As relationships develop, communication advances from relatively shallow to more personal levels of intimacy, resulting in higher levels of pleasure. Because intimate information is less readily available than nonintimate information, intimate disclosures have been perceived as generally more valued and rewarding (Lynn, 1978; Petty & Mirels, 1981).

Whereas investigations of *depth* of self-disclosure in an interpersonal context have largely focused on gratifications based on relationship development, this study sought to examine not only how intimate self-disclosure in a mediated context impacted beyond the character and viewer relationship, but more holistically, how it affected one's overall enjoyment experience. While character and viewer relationships have been investigated by media psychologists for decades (Giles, 2002; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Sood & Rogers, 2000), the influence specifically of characters

self-disclosing personal information on audience perceptions remains unexplored. With the rising popularity of reality-based programs, scholars have argued that viewing the disclosure of intimate and personal moments is particularly gratifying and pleasing for spectators (see Calvert, 2009). Moreover, individuals have reported a preference for watching and learning about the lives of real people rather than characters in scripted programming (Gardyn, 2001; Hill, 2005; Jones, 2003; van Zoonen, 2001). Thus, if feelings of pleasure and satisfaction are outcomes of intimate disclosures between people, it can be expected that in the case of entertainment media, the more personal information a character discloses, the more viewers should elicit generally positive emotional and cognitive responses. With this line of reasoning, more intimate character disclosures would likely result in higher levels of "enjoyment" for audiences.[1]

In addition to the impact of depth of disclosure on audience engagement, learning about a character's personal information can take a variety of forms. We may acquire knowledge about a character from himself or herself, or from a third-party or narrator. In the former case, self-disclosure can occur between characters (e.g., via conversations or interviews) and between a character and viewer (i.e., via confessionals or direct address). These different *modes* of information exchange offer qualitatively distinct experiences for viewers (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Morse, 1985; Munson, 1993). For the purpose of this study, we defined *mode of information delivery* as consisting of three conditions: two self-disclosure conditions (i.e., character disclosing information to another character or the viewer) and a control condition in which no self-disclosure takes place (i.e., narrator discloses the character's information to the viewer). Whereas research has pointed to the importance of certain production formats, such as close-ups in promoting viewer involvement and emotional closeness (Baggaley, 1980; Galan, 1986; Salomon, 1994; Shook, 1996; Williams, 1964, 1968; Zettl, 1989, 1999) and direct address as a means to facilitate interactional responses (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and authenticity (Aslama & Pantti, 2006), there are no empirical studies that have specifically examined the impact of these three distinct modes of information delivery as they pertain to entertainment. Furthermore, in light of the important role of self-disclosure in interpersonal communication, individuals are constantly regulating the disclosure or concealment of personal information (Petronio, 2002). While any form of information exchange privileges the recipient with shared knowledge and resources (Petronio, 1991), this knowledge

acquisition that is perceived as rewarding and valued (Lynn, 1978; Petty & Mirels, 1981) is perhaps similar to how viewers feel when character self-disclosures take place. Specifically, if the direction and privilege of information comes openly from the character (actual source) as compared with a narrator (an alternative source), the audience perhaps perceives such an interaction as even more authentic, intimate, and fulfilling, deriving greater pleasure or enjoyment from the experience. In support of this reasoning, literature on dyadic relationships emphasizes the notion that self-disclosure facilitates general feelings of pleasure and satisfaction (e.g., Aron et al., 1997; Greene et al., 2006; Lynn, 1978; Sprecher & Duck, 1994).

Considering that depth and mode are important dimensions of information exchange, this study suggest that feelings of joy and pleasure when witnessing self-disclosures among characters in entertainment programs are most analogous to the experience of enjoyment. Enjoyment has been defined as a favorable disposition toward media content (Zillmann & Bryant, 1994), a pleasurable affective response to the consumption of media fare (Raney, 2003), and a state that results from undergoing sensory delight, suspense, achievement, etc. (Vorderer et al., 2004). Scholars have used an array of terms to describe the construct, including *liking* (Valkenburg & Cantor, 2000) and *attraction* (Krcmar & Greene, 1999), for they imply the derivation of happiness or a hedonic state. Taking into account these theoretical definitions, enjoyment of media indeed suggests a variety of gratifications linked to pleasure. Therefore, the satisfaction one attains from experiencing more intimate self-disclosures in an interpersonal context is argued to translate to the "enjoyment" of witnessing such portrayals in an entertainment context. For these reasons, the present research sought to examine the degree to which depth of disclosure and mode of information delivery were associated with enjoyment, our primary relationship of interest (see Figure 1).

Mediators Involved in the Effects of Disclosure on Enjoyment

In an effort to test the proposed model that links mediated self-disclosure to enjoyment, this study predicted that a number of mediation processes are involved.

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[1] Whereas scholars (e.g., Wheeless & Grotz, 1976) have proposed other dimensions of self-disclosure, such as accuracy, relevance, valence, and intentionality, the literature on relational closeness has pointed to depth of disclosure as a key mechanism driving relationship development. While other dimensions may be relevant in the examination of mediated self-disclosure, for the purpose of this study, we focus on *depth* or level of intimacy as a dimension facilitating enjoyment, for it offers considerable support in predicting one's overall state of pleasure or satisfaction. In addition, it is important to note that self-disclosure examined in this research pertains to the exchange of generally positive or neutral information, as the literature indicates that disclosure of negative information produces an adverse effect on relational satisfaction (Dalto, Ajzen, & Kaplan, 1979). Nevertheless, we offer future directions of scholarship as we highlight other important dimensions of self-disclosure in the context of entertainment media, in the Discussion section.
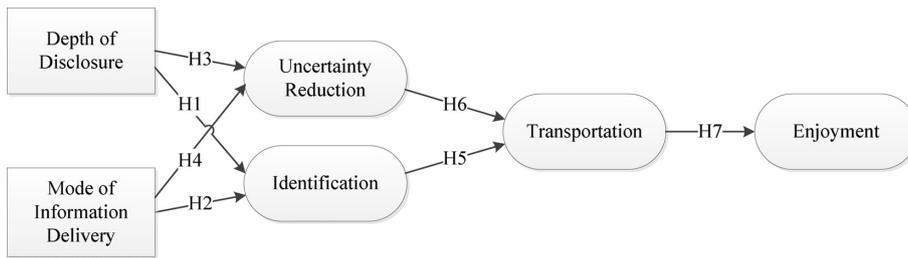
Figure 1. Proposed model of the effects of depth of disclosure and mode of information delivery on identification, uncertainty reduction, transportation, and enjoyment.

Identification and Uncertainty Reduction

Another common audience response toward entertainment media is identification, defined as the process through which viewers place themselves in the position of a character and vicariously participate in the character's experiences (Cohen, 2001, 2006; Emery, 1959). This imaginative process or adoption of an alternative social reality entails both affective and cognitive dimensions. The most common form of affective identification is empathy, described as one's ability to share a character's emotions. Cognitive identification involves the understanding of a character's goals and motives, encompassing the ability to understand events in a manner similar to that in which the character understands them. Given these characteristics of identification, we argue that empathic and cognitive appraisal responses are largely associated with the degree of knowledge one has about a character. Informed by the interpersonal literature, the link between self-disclosure and empathy (Castellani, 2006; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Tam et al., 2006) has received considerable support in the context of dyadic relationships. Self-disclosure helps to regulate not only how others see the communicator, but also how others empathize (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Therefore, it is reasonable that greater disclosure of intimate information about a character would likely increase the chance that identification would occur, allowing viewers to engage in perspective taking if more personal information about the character is known.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Depth of disclosure is positively related to identification.

As previously noted, self-disclosure in a mediated context operates in two ways: between characters and between a character and viewer. Character-to-character disclosures are prevalent in fictional programs (e.g., dramas, sitcoms, and soap operas) in which personal information is exchanged via conversation, and in nonfiction programs (e.g., talk, news, and reality-based shows) in the case of interviews. Character-to-viewer disclosures are more readily portrayed on reality-based programs, in which characters disclose private information to the audience in the form of confessionals (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Dovey, 2000; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994; White, 2002). Provided that mode of information delivery varies across programs,

we expect that this variable plays an important role on audience involvement. Nodelman (1991) found that if a character narrated a story, as compared with a third party doing so, identification would be more likely to occur. Furthermore, particular formats that utilize close-ups have been found to enhance identification (Galan, 1986). Such findings suggest that character self-disclosures perhaps encourage viewers to engage in perspective taking more than narrator disclosures do. Additionally, since confessionals utilize close-ups to showcase characters speaking directly to the camera, these formats may likely produce the highest levels of identification. To further support these predictions, there is the notion that information exchange is coordinated by privacy boundaries and that the sharing of knowledge puts the communicator in a state of greater vulnerability (Petronio, 1991). Therefore it is understandable why emotional and mutual understanding may likely occur under conditions when private resources are shared by the original source (e.g., the character) instead of a third party. Such disclosures perhaps foster a greater sense of authenticity and empathy. For these reasons, the direction and privilege of character information is expected to impact identification.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Mode of information delivery is related to identification such that identification is greatest when a character self-discloses to a viewer, followed by when a character self-discloses to a character, and it is least when a narrator discloses to a viewer.

While identification may result from increased self-disclosure, relational certainty has also been noted as a key motive and outcome for information exchange (Berger, 1988, 1997; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Specifically, goals for communication may not always be promotion-focused to heighten intimacy, but may also be prevention-focused to lessen ambiguity. From an uncertainty reduction perspective, knowledge acquisition from self-disclosure can both decrease one's insecurity about a relationship and also heighten predictability. Specifically, the more an individual self-discloses to another, the more likely he or she will learn about the interaction, thus establishing certainty about the status and future of the relationship. Relationships with characters have been found to be associated with not only reduction of uncertainty but also the ability to predict the

characters' attitudes and feelings (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that in the context of entertainment media, when more personal information (generally positive or neutral in nature) about the character is revealed, viewers should be more likely to gain a deeper level of familiarity and certainty.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Depth of disclosure is positively related to uncertainty reduction.

Similarly, mode of information delivery is suggested to also impact uncertainty reduction. Whereas character narration (Nodelman, 1991) and the use of close-ups (Galan, 1986) allow viewers to engage in perspective taking by learning about the character's background, motivations, decisions, and actions, self-disclosure among characters should also likely increase certainty and predictability. Moreover, the privilege of giving information to the audience rather than to another character should have a greater impact on uncertainty reduction through direct address, as personal information is deemed a valuable resource and puts the discloser into a state of greater vulnerability (Petronio, 1991).

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Mode of information delivery is related to uncertainty reduction such that uncertainty reduction is greatest when a character self-discloses to a viewer, followed by when a character self-discloses to a character, and it is least when a narrator discloses to a viewer.

Transportation

With increased identification and uncertainty reduction, we also suggest that viewers will in turn become more "transported" into the narrative world. According to Nell (1988), transportation is the holistic and immersive feeling of being lost in a story. Indicators of transportation may consist of the audience not being able to discern things in their surroundings or feeling psychologically distant from reality (Green et al., 2004). Although identification and transportation both describe ways individuals become involved with media texts, Tal-Or and Cohen (2010) argue that both processes are qualitatively distinct. While identification is content-specific in that it describes a strong attachment with a character based on the adoption and sharing of goals, motives, and perspectives, transportation focuses on the degree of narrative absorption. Whereas the causal direction of identification and transportation has been theoretically debated (see Cohen, 2001; Slater & Rouner, 2002), recent empirical results show that character involvement heightens both transportation and emotions in the context of television dramas (Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011). Murphy et al. (2011) not only differentiated measures between involvement with a character and that with a narrative via factor analysis, but also showed that identification served as an antecedent to transportation.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to expect that feelings of certainty and familiarity with characters who display intimate forms of self-disclosure (also components of character involvement) should likely lead to higher levels of absorption in the narrative.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Identification is positively related to transportation.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Uncertainty reduction is positively related to transportation.

Enjoyment

Green et al. (2004) suggest that transportation "illuminates the experience of enjoyment … the benefits that might come from media exposure … and the conditions under which enjoyment is more or less likely to occur" (p. 324). One of the fundamental elements in enjoying media is that it moves individuals into a story world (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Green et al., 2004). The notion that people desire to be entertained and use escapism as a means through which enjoyment is experienced points to the association between transportation and enjoyment. Transportation has been found to increase the enjoyment of not only short stories, but also films (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Likewise, a number of pleasurable responses have helped to explain why absorption in a narrative is deemed gratifying. Specifically, transportation can deter a focus on the self, reducing self-discrepancies and negative affective states (Moskalenko & Heine, 2003). Transportation can also lead to enrichment through new knowledge (Green et al., 2004). For these reasons, we argue that in the case of entertainment media that feature variations in depth and mode of information delivery, transportation into a narrative should likely result in greater enjoyment.

Hypothesis (H7): Transportation is positively related to enjoyment.

Summary

The present research proposed a model to illustrate the aforementioned causal relationships involving depth of disclosure and mode of information delivery and the dependent variables – identification, uncertainty reduction, transportation, and enjoyment (see Figure 1). This model represents the ideas that (1) depth and mode are associated with identification and uncertainty reduction, (2) identification and uncertainty reduction lead to greater transportation, and (3) transportation predicts enjoyment. The model also implies several indirect effects of interest, including the notions that (1) depth and mode lead to transportation via identification and uncertainty reduction and

(2) identification and uncertainty reduction lead to greater enjoyment via transportation.

Method

Design and Participants

A total of 185 undergraduate students (43.2% women; age: $M = 20.44$, $SD = 1.56$) from a large university in the northeast region of the United States were randomly assigned to one of six video conditions in a 2 (Depth of Disclosure: Low Intimacy, High Intimacy) × 3 (Mode of Information Delivery: Character-to-Viewer, Character-to-Character, Narrator-to-Viewer) between-subjects experiment. Participants consisted of 81.1% Whites, 7.0% African Americans, 5.4% Asians, 4.3% Hispanics, 0.5% American Indians, and 3.2% with no indication of race.

Procedure

Participants were asked to attend a lab session in which they were presented with a segment from MTV's *The Real World: Las Vegas* about a target person. After viewing the video, the following dependent variables were assessed: identification, uncertainty reduction, transportation, and enjoyment. Participants also reported general demographic information.

Stimulus Materials

A series of video clips were edited so that each incorporated the introduction of MTV's *The Real World: Las Vegas*, followed by shots of the skyline, streets, and people. The last establishing shot panned across the apartment, followed by the disclosure of information about the character. The disclosure was manipulated, in that depth and mode of information delivery varied.

Depth of Disclosure

Depth refers to the level of intimacy attached to the information revealed. While several scales have assessed depth as a dependent measure based on the disclosure of particular content areas (e.g., Archer & Berg, 1978; Jourard, 1971; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Wheeless & Grotz, 1976), due to our intention to manipulate depth in this study, we referred to Altman and Taylor's (1973) classification scheme for intimacy of disclosure. Viewers were either exposed to a character's peripheral or core information. We defined the exchange of peripheral information, such as biography (e.g., age, hometown, and occupation) as "low in intimacy." In contrast, deeper aspects of one's self-concept, including beliefs, needs, and fears about particular issues, were characterized as "high in intimacy."

Mode of Information Delivery

To manipulate mode, conditions in which the character disclosed to either the viewer or another character served as treatments of self-disclosure. The character-to-viewer condition focused on a character speaking directly to the camera in a confessional room. The character-to-character condition showed a character revealing personal information to another character via conversation. The narrator condition served as the control in which no self-disclosure occurred. This condition was constructed using close-up character shots and text by which a narrator (third party) disclosed information about the character. Since self-disclosure entails that personal information is disclosed by the original source, the difference between the experimental conditions and control condition was the presence of self-disclosure. Across all modes of information delivery, the content of the disclosure remained consistent for each character. Within the depth conditions, the content of the disclosure varied for each character due to the fact that preexisting video was used to construct the stimulus. To ascertain that the content varied only by depth, a pretest was conducted to check the manipulation.

Pretest

One hundred and forty-one undergraduate students from a large university in the northeast region of the United States participated in the pretest (65.2% women; age: $M = 20.69$, $SD = 1.20$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 2 (Depth of Disclosure: Low Intimacy, High Intimacy) × 3 (Mode of Information Delivery: Character-to-Viewer, Character-to-Character, Narrator-to-Viewer) between-subjects experiment. Four video instantiations were shown per condition: two featuring a female character (Trishelle or Arissa) and two featuring a male character (Frank or Steven). Since scholars have pointed to sex differences in breadth and depth of self-disclosure (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Jourard & Richman, 1963) and interpersonal orientation (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), our objective was to select a male and female character per condition.

Content and Context of Disclosure

Each clip contained 60–90 s of disclosure of personal information. For low intimacy conditions, characters revealed biographical information (e.g., age and hometown). All characters were between 22 and 23 years of age and directly out of college. For high intimacy conditions, characters revealed more intimate aspects of themselves, divulging information about their relationships with family or significant others, consistent with Altman and Taylor's (1973) conceptualization of "intimate" information which reflects one's beliefs, needs, and fears. While details of the personal relationships discussed by the characters were different, our objective was to incorporate information about the character

that would be deemed as more intimate than the biographical information and to keep the topic and attributes of the characters consistent.

Measures for Perceptions of Disclosure

To test the efficacy of the pretest stimuli with regard to depth of disclosure, participants reported their perceptions of the information learned about the target person. Five 10-point semantic differential scales measured perceived depth: not intimate / intimate, personal / not personal, not revealing / revealing, private / public, and deep / superficial (Cronbach's α = .70 to .78 across characters). To minimize the risk of potential confounds, participants also reported the accuracy, relevance, and valence of the information (informed by Wheeless & Grotz, 1976). Accuracy was assessed by four items: sincere / not sincere, dishonest / honest, accurate / inaccurate, and is not a true reflection of who he or she is / is a true reflection of who he or she is (Cronbach's α = .64 to .75). Relevance was measured by four items: irrelevant to me / relevant to me, does not interest me / interests me, relates to me / does not relate to me, and does not matter to me / matters to me (Cronbach's α = .78 to .88). Valence was measured by four items: negative / positive, not pleasant / pleasant, places him or her in a good light / places him or her in a bad light, and reflects negatively on him or her / reflects positively on him or her (Cronbach's α = .74 to .90).

Results of Pretest

Perceived depth was examined using a 2 (Depth) × 3 (Mode) analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each character. Across the female characters, the manipulation check was effective for Trishelle, $F(1, 135) = 94.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .41$, in which her information in the high intimacy condition ($M = 7.45$, $SE = .16$) was perceived as significantly more intimate than that in the low intimacy condition ($M = 5.38$, $SE = .15$). Across the male characters, Frank's information in the high intimacy condition ($M = 7.03$, $SE = .17$) was deemed significantly more intimate than that in the low intimacy condition ($M = 5.10$, $SE = .16$), $F(1, 135) = 70.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$.

A series of ANOVAs were also employed to ensure that perceived accuracy, relevance, and valence did not differ across the two characters. Findings indicated no differences in accuracy and relevance; however for valence, Trishelle's information in the low intimacy condition ($M = 5.81$, $SE = .17$) was deemed more positive than her information in the high intimacy condition ($M = 4.76$, $SE = .18$), $F(1, 135) = 17.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. For Frank, his information in the high intimacy condition ($M = 7.01$, $SE = .17$) was perceived to be more positive than his information in the low intimacy condition ($M = 6.14$, $SE = .17$), $F(1, 135) = 12.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. Although this difference was found, the purpose of our study was to examine the

disclosure of generally positive or neutral information, confirmed by the mean valence scores. An effort was made to remove potential confounds (e.g., accuracy and relevance), keep character traits (e.g., age and education) constant, and demonstrate the efficacy of the depth manipulation for two characters. Therefore, Trishelle and Frank met the stimulus requirements and were used as instantiations per experimental condition.

Measures

Likert-type scales from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*) measured the following dependent variables: identification, uncertainty reduction, transportation, and enjoyment.

Identification

Identification was conceptualized as immersing oneself into the role of the character emotionally and cognitively. Thirteen items tapped into dimensions of identification, such as empathy, understanding, and motivation (Cohen, 2001). Examples included "I was able to understand the events in a manner similar to that in which the character understood them" and "I felt the emotions of the character" ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.25$, Cronbach's α = .94).

Uncertainty Reduction

To assess uncertainty reduction, six items from Clatterbuck's (1979) Attributional Confidence Scale were used to tap into the degree to which viewers felt confident about predicting the character's behaviors, attitudes, and emotions. Examples included "I am confident about my ability to predict how the character will behave" and "I am accurate at predicting the attitudes of the character" ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.40$, Cronbach's α = .93).

Transportation

To assess mental involvement and immersion into the narrative, 11 items were used from Green and Brock's (2000) transportation scale. Examples included "I was mentally involved in the narrative while watching it" and "I easily pictured myself in the scenes of the events in the episode" ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.92$, Cronbach's α = .77).

Enjoyment

Enjoyment of the video was measured by 14 items from Krcmar and Renfro (2005) and Raney and Bryant (2002). Examples included "I had a good time watching this video"

and "This video was entertaining" ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.21$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Results

Depth of Disclosure and Mode of Information Delivery on Enjoyment

A 2 (Depth) × 3 (Mode) ANOVA was employed to test our main relationship of interest: the impact of depth of disclosure and mode of information delivery on enjoyment. The analysis revealed no significant main effect for depth, $F(1, 179) = 1.45$, $p = .23$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, and no significant Depth × Mode interaction, $F(2, 179) = 1.40$, $p = .25$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. However, findings showed a significant main effect for mode, $F(2, 179) = 8.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, indicating that participants reported significantly greater enjoyment when watching character-to-viewer ($M = 3.99$, $SE = .14$) and character-to-character ($M = 3.98$, $SE = .15$) self-disclosures as compared with narrator-to-viewer disclosure ($M = 3.21$, $SE = .15$).

Hypothesis Tests

To test the effects of depth of disclosure and mode of information delivery on identification, a 2 (Depth) × 3 (Mode) ANOVA revealed a main effect for depth, $F(1, 180) = 10.24$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, and mode, $F(2, 180) = 6.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Specifically, more intimate character disclosure ($M = 3.67$, $SE = .12$) produced significantly greater identification than less intimate character disclosure ($M = 3.13$, $SE = .12$), showing support for H1. Participants also reported significantly greater identification when watching character-to-viewer ($M = 3.66$, $SE = .14$) and character-to-character ($M = 3.56$, $SE = .15$) self-disclosures as compared with narrator-to-viewer disclosure ($M = 2.98$, $SE = .15$), indicating partial support for H2.

Similarly, a 2 (Depth) × 3 (Mode) ANOVA was performed to examine the effects of depth of disclosure and mode of information delivery on uncertainty reduction. Although the analysis yielded no main effect for depth, $F(1, 180) = .50$, $p = .48$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, showing no support

for H3, a main effect for mode was found, $F(2, 180) = 6.21$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Patterns indicated that participants reported significantly greater uncertainty reduction after watching character-to-viewer ($M = 3.44$, $SE = .17$) and character-to-character ($M = 3.32$, $SE = .18$) self-disclosures as compared with narrator-to-viewer disclosure ($M = 2.63$, $SE = .18$), indicating partial support for H4.

A series of linear regressions were performed to test the remaining hypotheses. The analyses revealed that identification predicted transportation ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$), uncertainty reduction predicted transportation ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$), and transportation predicted enjoyment ($\beta = .69$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H5, H6, and H7 were supported, respectively.

Model Test

Prior to testing our proposed model (Figure 1), we took into consideration two important findings from the 2 (Depth) × 3 (Mode) ANOVA on enjoyment: (1) depth of disclosure did not predict enjoyment, but mode of information delivery did and (2) the main effect of mode showed that character-to-viewer and character-to-character self-disclosures did not differ in enjoyment, but both self-disclosure conditions predicted greater enjoyment than the narrator condition (when self-disclosure was absent). In light of these results, we removed depth of disclosure from further analysis and dichotomized the mode variable into two levels, self-disclosure versus no self-disclosure.

This initial model was tested in AMOS (see Figure 2) with all paths reporting standardized coefficients. Except for mode of information delivery, all of the variables were modeled as single-indicator latent constructs with errors estimated as $(1 - \alpha) \sigma^2$. The first run of this model with multiple mediators (identification, uncertainty reduction, and transportation) showed that all of the paths were statistically significant, except uncertainty reduction to transportation. Specifically, self-disclosure was positively associated with uncertainty reduction ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$) and identification ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$). While uncertainty reduction was not associated with transportation ($\beta = .08$, $p = .30$), identification was positively associated with transportation ($\beta = .66$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, self-disclosure predicted enjoyment ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), as did transportation ($\beta = .76$, $p < .001$). Bootstrapping procedures using
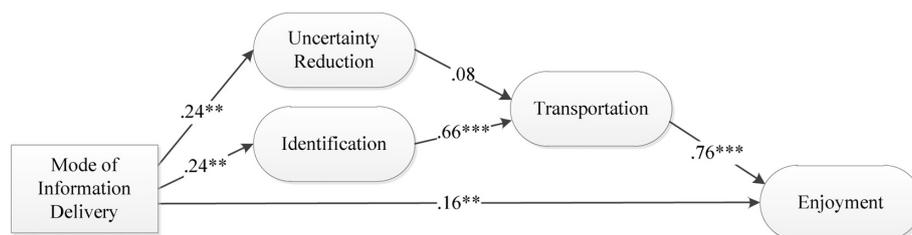

Figure 2. Initial model of the effects of mode of information delivery on identification, uncertainty reduction, transportation, and enjoyment. Mode of information delivery was coded as 0 = narrator; 1 = self-disclosure. χ^2 ($df = 3$) = 4.55, $p = .21$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 1.00, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
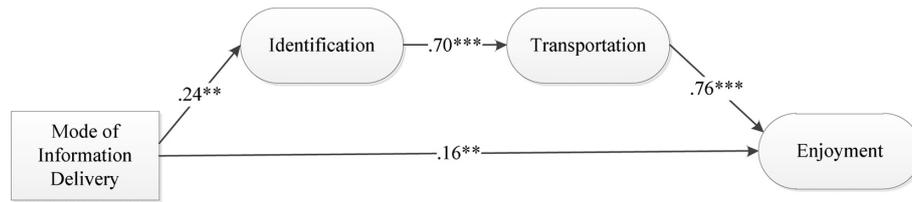
Figure 3. Resultant model of the effect of mode of information delivery on identification, transportation, and enjoyment. Mode of information delivery was coded as 0 = narrator; 1 = self-disclosure. χ^2 (df = 2) = 2.21, p = .33, comparative fit index (CFI) = 1.00, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .02; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

2,000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008) indicated that uncertainty reduction did not serve as a significant mediator in the relationship of mode and transportation (β = .05, p = .32). Therefore, the overall fit of the model could be improved, χ^2 (df = 3) = 4.55, p = .21, comparative fit index (CFI) = 1.00, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05. Only paths that were significant at p < .05 were retained in the final model (cf. Oliver, Kalyanaraman, Mahood, & Ramasubramanian, 2007; Segrin & Nabi, 2002).

Removing uncertainty reduction from the model resulted in our final model (see Figure 3) with indices that suggested a good fit, χ^2 (DF = 2) = 2.21, p = .33, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.02 (see Arbuckle, 1996; Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Figure 3 shows all paths with standardized coefficients as statistically significant. Using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bootstrapping procedures, two significant indirect paths supported the notion that self-disclosure predicts enjoyment. Specifically, the indirect path from self-disclosure to transportation was mediated by identification (β = .30, p < .01). Likewise, the indirect path from identification to enjoyment was mediated by transportation (β = .52, p < .01).

Lastly, to ensure that there were no character differences in the model between the male and female characters, a multiple group analysis was performed. A chi-square test for differences on structural weights indicated that the model was invariant for the male and female characters, χ^2 (DF = 4) = 0.74, p = .95. Therefore, the resultant model suggests that (1) mode of information delivery (when self-disclosure is present) predicts identification, (2) identification leads to greater transportation, and (3) transportation predicts enjoyment.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to investigate the impact of mediated self-disclosure on viewers' enjoyment. Considering the popularity of reality-based programming and the use of more innovative self-disclosure formats (e.g., confessionals and interviews) (see Aslama & Pantti, 2006), the effect of the direct sharing of personal information from a media character is vital both theoretically and practically. In general, findings support the processes of identification and transportation as pathways through which exposure to self-disclosure predicts enjoyment of media fare.

Our primary goal was to examine the effect of depth of disclosure and mode of information delivery on enjoyment. While we found that the level of intimate information exchange did not directly influence viewers' enjoyment, it was evident that the mode of information delivery did. Whereas the recipient of the disclosure could vary between a character and an audience member, there was no difference in enjoyment between these two scenarios. Instead, patterns indicate that enjoyment was significantly higher when self-disclosure was present as compared with when the same information was shared by a narrator or third party. This research advances our understanding of the important role of "character address" in producing pleasurable responses among viewers. In other words, personal information coming from the original source was deemed more gratifying than if it was indirectly conveyed in the program. Such findings point to the notion that direct communication from a media persona may be both favored and appreciated.

Most interesting are the mediating processes through which portrayals of self-disclosure were found to affect audience enjoyment. The best model fit indicated that exposure to a character self-disclosing enhanced identification, which in turn heightened transportation, leading to greater enjoyment. These findings provide additional support for the idea that the experiences of identification and transportation are qualitatively different (Murphy et al., 2011; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). Although theoretical debates have centered on whether character involvement serves as an antecedent or outcome of transportation (Cohen, 2001; Slater & Rouner, 2002), this research suggests that emotional and cognitive adoption of a character's role predicts narrative absorption. While these processes may be highly related, involvement that is content-specific (identification) and one that is content-irrelevant (transportation) are theoretically distinct in nature. Furthermore, consistent with results of research by Murphy et al. (2011), this study found that involvement with a character following self-disclosure facilitated immersion into the narrative. In turn, story involvement elicited pleasure and increased a viewer's overall enjoyment of the program, in line with previous work supporting the association between transportation and enjoyment (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green et al., 2004; Moskalenko & Heine, 2003).

Although uncertainty reduction did not emerge in the resultant model as a significant mediator, it is important to acknowledge that witnessing a character self-disclose (regardless of whether the disclosure was directed to another character or viewer) produced greater predictability and familiarity with the character, compared with a narrator disclosing the same information. This finding speaks to the idea that the direction of information exchange matters in the context of knowledge acquisition and the confidence attached to knowing a character's feelings, thoughts, and actions. Additionally, the hypothesis test supported the expectation that uncertainty reduction was associated with transportation such that with enhanced certainty about the character, individuals were more likely to experience narrative immersion and absorption. In light of these results, some limitations and alternative explanations should be raised. While the present research focused on the disclosure of generally positive or neutral information, some information was deemed more positive than other information (even though the nature of the information trended toward the positive). Therefore, it is possible that the disclosure produced certainty among the participants about their ambivalence rather toward than likeability of the character (Sunnafrank, 1986). Furthermore, because the literature on uncertainty reduction shows competing support for individuals' desire to reduce uncertainty (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Kellermann & Reynolds, 1990), the conditions of this research could have constrained uncertainty reduction to emerge as a significant mediator. Moreover, it could be the case that transportation is more likely to occur when self-disclosure is positive rather than negative. The notion that people generally like others who disclose positive information more than those who disclose negative information (Bazarova, 2012) may have accounted for the nonsignificant path between uncertainty reduction and transportation in the initial model. In a similar vein, research has shown that for negatively valenced information, self-disclosure can lead to increased uncertainty and decreased social attraction (Douglas, 1994; Scheidel, 1977). Therefore, future research should investigate how the valence of information in a mediated context plays a role in impacting audience responses.

The present research also demonstrates that while depth of disclosure did not directly predict enjoyment, the level of intimate information exchange positively predicted identification. This finding suggests that narratives featuring the exchange of more personal information about a character indeed foster greater perspective taking, allowing viewers to emotionally and cognitively take on the role of the character. This notion may be valuable in explaining why people on reality television (which showcases intimate character disclosures) are perceived as more relatable (Hall, 2009; Hiltbrand, 2004; Nabi et al., 2003) than those in fictional or scripted programs.

In light of this study's findings that point to the considerable role of self-disclosure in entertainment media, methodological limitations should be raised. Whereas information for the stimulus was edited to remain consistent across modes of information delivery, the content of intimate and nonintimate information varied for each character due to the use of preexisting video. While we minimized potential confounds by removing the influence of perceived accuracy and relevance and keeping character traits and topics constant, there were slight differences in the valence of content between Trishelle's and Frank's disclosures. However, we did uphold the ecological validity of the study by using clips from an actual television series, *The Real World*. In addition, the duration of the disclosure ranged between 60 and 90 s and was taken out of context, which poses potential external validity issues. Consequently, future studies should effectively control for valence of content and expose viewers to longer video stimuli to more accurately detect the true and natural effects of mediated self-disclosure.

The findings reported in this research have a number of implications for theory, society, and practice. This study theoretically contributes to our understanding of the contexts in which interpersonal relationships may be functionally equivalent to mediated relationships. It was expected that relationship satisfaction as a result of self-disclosure (generally positive or neutral in nature) would translate to the *enjoyment* of witnessing characters self-disclose in entertainment media. This association emerged via the processes of identification and transportation. This work represents a step forward to understanding the impact of mediated self-disclosure on audience involvement, particularly as it holds implications for prolonged satisfaction in the form of program viewership.

Although this research focused on audience responses limited to identification, uncertainty reduction, transportation, and enjoyment, future scholars should consider expanding the study of mediated self-disclosure to inform parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin et al., 1985; Sood & Rogers, 2000). In particular, when characters privilege viewers with highly personal information, perceived intimacy, similarity, and wishful identification may be outcomes of self-disclosure. These interactions that occur between audience members and media figures can over time develop into parasocial relationships such that viewers respond to these characters as if they were in typical social relationships (Giles, 2002). This form of companionship may boost not only character likeability, social attraction, and dependency, but also the desire for future face-to-face interactions (e.g., wanting to meet the media figure). Therefore, self-disclosure in an entertainment context may serve to strengthen the interpersonal richness and quality of character and viewer relationships, potentially increasing fandom.

Results from this research also suggest implications for our social environment. If mediated relationships are functionally equivalent to interpersonal ones, to what degree are our beliefs and expectations of privacy impacted by character disclosures? Many reality-based programs encourage acts of personal and dramatic expression and even allow average Joes to become instant celebrities (Turner, 2006). Heavy viewers of mediated self-disclosure may develop greater expectations for private information *or* perceive intimate information as more appropriate. This association could be explained by cultivation theory (see Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986), suggesting that

prolonged exposure to themes of intimate disclosures construct a social reality where people are less sensitive to privacy. This trend toward a more interactive media environment, particularly with the popularity of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Google+) make issues of self-disclosure even more relevant in today's society.

Despite potential negative implications of mediated self-disclosure, this study found that the direct exchange of generally positive or neutral personal information was beneficial in heightening involvement with both the character and narrative. This research provides support for the gratifying outcomes that self-disclosure produces, offering practical implications for the entertainment industry. In particular, creating a program that effectively incorporates self-disclosure may be particularly advantageous in generating liking, appreciation, and overall enjoyment of the show.

Results from this research may also be applied to other television genres outside of reality television. As previously noted, the use of the confessional is not unique to reality-based programs, but is also common across talk and news programs. *The Office* is a situational comedy that successfully adopted this feature in a fictional office environment. Moreover, the television series, *House of Cards*, utilizes a format where the main character breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly towards the camera. Future research may consider exploring the effects of self-disclosure across different genres, with attention given to variations in scripted versus unscripted programming and the motivations behind the disclosure. For example, viewers may be aware of the contrived nature of reality programs (Hill, 2002), and the perceived inauthenticity of such programs potentially has a bearing on the effects of mediated self-disclosure. Additionally, the literature on interpersonal communication suggests that there are inappropriate forms of self-disclosure (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979) that produce adverse effects in dyadic relationships. Therefore, future studies should examine whether inappropriate or excessive disclosures by characters result in analogous responses among viewers of entertainment media.

In conclusion, this study provides theoretical and empirical support for the distinctive effects of self-disclosure by a character, as compared with that by a narrator or third party. While the level of intimate disclosure did not impact enjoyment, the mode in which information was exchanged had a significant bearing. This work addressed the efficacy of "character address," through not only visual cues, but also personal information, in increasing program enjoyment. Such a response speaks to the similarity between face-to-face and character-to-viewer relationships. The findings not only suggest how our understanding of interpersonal interactions informs mediated ones, but also emphasize the vital role of mediated self-disclosure in our entertainment experiences.

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