Age Identification, Social Identity Gratifications, and Television Viewing

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The relationship between social identity and television viewing gratifications is investigated. Focusing on age group identity, initial evidence for the reliability and validity of an age identity gratifications scale is provided. Among young adults, the scale predicts age identification and television viewing. Young adults' selection of shows featuring young characters leads to increased age group identification. Findings are discussed in terms of uses and gratifications and social identity theory. Future research directions are outlined.

Little research has examined the relationship between individuals' identifications with large social groups and their media consumption. Factors motivating television viewing choices have been examined largely at an individual level, even though examination of demographic differences in media use is common in the research literature. Meanwhile, scholars examining the role of social identifications in behavior appear largely to have ignored media use. This is surprising given that television viewing is the dominant leisure activity for many people (Harris, 1989). This study examines the extent to which gratifications associated with a particular social identity (age identity) are related to television viewing selections. It blends theories from mass media and intergroup social psychology.

Within the media literature, the uses and gratifications (U&G) framework has stimulated considerable research demonstrating that individuals are creative in finding media messages that provide them with particular gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985). To date, motivations for viewing particular shows have been considered primarily at the individual level (e.g., to seek out information: Rubin, 1983) or at the interpersonal level (e.g., to have something to talk about with friends and coworkers: Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980). However, gratifications may also operate at the level of social identity. That is, individuals may seek media portrayals that strengthen their identification with a particular social group and/or make that identification more positive (i.e., provide *social identity gratifications*). This point has been made previously by Blumler (1985) who notes that:

> ...the main dimensions of audience gratification and concern have not made a separate space for a notion of *social identity*... little attention has been paid to the *social group memberships and affiliations*, formal and subjective, that might feed audience concerns to maintain

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and strengthen their social identities through what they see, read and hear in the media (p. 50, emphasis in original).

Blumler's (1985) chapter lays out a rationale for such an approach in some detail, and provides extensive justification for the value of considering social identity as part of the U&G framework. He presents some data showing that members of particular societal groups differ in their evaluations of the importance of particular gratifications. However, his research continues the trend of measuring gratifications only at the intra- or inter-personal level.

Other research has addressed indirectly the notion that social group memberships may be important in media uses and gratifications. Early work in the U&G paradigm examined individuals' use of media to learn about salient "outgroups" (e.g., Israelis learning about Arabs: see Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973). Such work is important in demonstrating the media's role in intergroup relations. However, Katz et al. focus on "learning" in terms of an information gathering function. They do not address the ways in which media may be used to reinforce intergroup boundaries or bolster hostilities. In addition, they focus only on the *outgroup*. We may also use the media to learn about our *ingroups*, in order to support our conceptions of the relative positions of ingroup and outgroup in society.

In addition to work examining learning about outgroups, U&G research has addressed the issue of identity. Blumler (1979) notes that identity gratifications may "operate to give added salience to something important in the audience member's own life or situation" (p. 17). For instance, the media may be used to provide support for an individual's ideas, or to remind an individual about past life events. It is clear in Blumler's writing that identity is conceived of at the personal, not social, level. Blumler (1985) acknowledges this point and bemoans the fact that social identity is lost within the personal identity framework.

Finally, U&G research has examined differences between age groups in terms of gratification seeking and media use (e.g., Blumler, 1985; Katz et al., 1973; Mundorf & Brownell, 1990). Research has also examined the life circumstances that may drive use of the media at particular stages of the life-span (e.g., Bleise, 1986; Rosengren & Windahl, 1989). While this research studies *respondents* in terms of social group memberships, the gratifications being studied remain at the individual level (e.g., the relative importance of information seeking versus entertainment for older versus younger adults). This study examines the nature of gratifications that are themselves tied to membership in broader social groups, not simply the ways in which the group shares particular individual gratifications (see Lull, 1985).

Social identity has been defined by Tajfel (1978) as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 63). Social identity is hence a part of the self-concept distinct from personal identity (which includes the conception of the self in terms of traits, personal appearance, etc. . .). Scholars working in the social identity theory (SIT) tradition established by Tajfel have analyzed the relationship between social identity and behavior, examining a wide variety of social groups (e.g., age groups, ethnic groups, gender groups

and the like: see Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Robinson, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986, for more thorough discussions of SIT). SIT maintains that people divide their social worlds into groups, and categorize themselves into certain of those groups. The theory suggests that positive social identity is derived from positively comparing one's ingroups with relevant outgroups. It has been suggested, that we receive self-esteem from favorably comparing our ingroups with relevant outgroups. For example, young people may gain self-esteem through positively contrasting their youth with negative impressions of older adults (Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995). SIT acknowledges that individuals are creative in the ways that they achieve this, actively seeking productive dimensions on which to make the comparisons. Considerable evidence exists for the processes suggested by SIT (Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Oakes & Turner, 1980; see Robinson, 1996, for an overview). However, SIT has paid little attention to media use.

It is proposed that *social identity gratifications* are one determinant of media choices. That is, individuals seek out particular messages that support their social identities (i.e., provide positive social comparisons with outgroups). One way in which positive social comparisons are possible is through viewing media messages featuring positive portrayals of individuals we identify as "ingroup" members.

Previous research has demonstrated a marked individual preference for viewing television shows featuring characters of the viewer's age. Older adults' favorite television shows feature more older adult characters than the rest of the television universe, while younger adults view shows featuring younger adult characters. This effect is particularly strong for lead characters in shows (Harwood, 1997; Mundorf & Brownell, 1990). Similar results are reported in controlled experimental research. Young adults offered brief *TV Guide* style descriptions of fake television shows preferred descriptions featuring younger characters, despite the fact that all other elements of the show were held constant (Harwood, 1997). Likewise, African-American viewers prefer sitcoms with African-American casts (Greenberg & Atkin, 1982), and certain viewers prefer characters of their own gender (Lickona, 1974).

Such findings are discussed in terms of providing "reinforcement" to viewers (Atkin, 1985) or being a product of a general desire to view characters similar to oneself (see Hoffner & Cantor, 1991, for a review). Some problems exist with these explanations. First, research has not articulated the processes underlying a desire for similarity or reinforcement, or attempted to measure variables that might explain the desire. We do not know exactly what is being reinforced, or why similarity is important to viewers. Second, research has rarely considered individual differences in these desires. All African Americans, for instance, will not equally prefer sitcoms featuring African American casts. What is it about some individuals that makes them seek out "ingroup" portrayals more than others?

From a SIT perspective, such findings can be understood as an attempt to seek support (or reinforcement) for an important part of the self-concept — social identities. The rewards from such viewing choices can be described as *social identity gratifications*. Viewing younger characters on TV may serve to reinforce notions that younger people are powerful in society, that they are valued by an important societal institution (i.e., the media: Giles, Bourhis, &

Taylor, 1977), and that they are demographically strong (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980). Such messages will be particularly important for those individuals for whom being young is an important aspect of self-concept. Generally, television viewing driven by social identity gratifications serves a social identity enhancement function. This analysis is socio-psychological, not sociological. The concern is not whether particular *groups* view particular shows or seek particular gratifications (Rubin, 1985). It is whether individuals view shows for reasons that relate to their level of identification with certain groups. An SIT analysis would explain broad "group-based" patterns of viewing, as well as variation within those groups. The current paper investigates a number of questions derived from this analysis.

First, if social identity gratifications are important, then we must seek to measure reliably such gratifications. Second, we expect to find links between social identity gratifications and levels of social identification. Individuals who are identified with a social group should endorse statements that the group plays a role in their viewing decisions. Third, social identity gratifications should be related to viewing choices (and the relationship should be similar to the way in which group identification is related to such choices). There must be some link between identity concerns and actual television viewing. Fourth, if social identity gratifications are driving viewing choices, we expect consequences of such choices in terms of social identification. Specifically, identification should be stronger after making choices that are thought to be identity-reinforcing. In the context of the current study, personal self-esteem and collective self-esteem are also considered as potential outcomes of making such choices. SIT considers self-esteem to be one factor motivating pursuit of positive social identity. Four research questions are presented.

RQ$_1$: Is it possible to measure reliably age identity gratifications associated with viewing television, and to demonstrate the validity of such measurement?

RQ$_2$: Are there links between age identity gratifications and age group identification?

RQ$_3$: Are there links between age identity gratifications and television viewing behavior?

RQ$_4$: Are there links between television viewing choices and age identification, personal self-esteem, or collective self-esteem?

Method

Participants

Students in an introductory Communication Studies class at a large Midwestern university completed a questionnaire in exchange for research credit (N=236).[2] Ten participants over the age of 30 were removed from the sample so as to retain a homogenous age group (resulting group mean age=19.54 years, SD=1.82). The sample was 64% female (36% male), and 82% European American (5% Asian American, 3% African American, 10% other ethnicities).

Materials

A questionnaire was designed to measure the variables described below. Presentation order of the various sections of the questionnaire was counterbalanced in alternative versions.

Television Viewing Preferences. Two types of viewing preferences were examined: preference for real television programs and preference for experi-mentally-manipulated artificial television programs.

To develop the survey of television viewing, a *TV Guide* from August 1997 was examined and all prime-time major network programs were selected. In addition, selected programs from minor networks (e.g., WB) were included, as were some popular syndicated shows. Fifty-eight shows were included.[3] In addition, preferences for viewing certain TV formats were measured (e.g., na-tional news shows, daytime soap operas, music videos). These were primarily situations where time prohibited measuring preference for individual shows in the formats. Participants rated their viewing of each show/format on a four-point scale (Never Watch; Watch Rarely; Watch Now and Again, Watch Regu-larly). Factor analysis of show preference data failed to yield a usable solution. However, cluster analysis clearly indicated four clusters of shows. The first consisted of 24 shows including situation comedies (*Fired Up, Naked Truth, Spin City*) and some drama presentations (*Xena, Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, Lois and Clark*). Internal consistency of this set of shows was good (Cronbach's alpha = .78). This cluster is referred to as the *General Entertainment* cluster. The second cluster included 16 shows, largely situation comedies (e.g., *Coach, Wings, News Radio*). This cluster appears to be defined by a largely male audience (respondent sex comparison: $t = 3.43$, $df = 224$, $p<.001$), and it is referred to as the *Male Sitcom* cluster. Again, internal consistency was good (alpha=.75). The third cluster featured three shows from the Fox Network (*Beverly Hills, 90210, Party of Five,* and *Melrose Place*) as well as daytime soap operas (alpha = .82). For our purposes, this is referred to as the *Fox* cluster. The final cluster included some very popular NBC shows (*Seinfeld, E.R.*), MTV shows (music videos and other MTV entertainment programming), and sports pro-gramming (alpha = .73). It is referred to as the *NBC/MTV* cluster.

To measure experimentally-controlled preference for shows featuring younger people, participants were exposed to a number of short descriptions of shows similar to the descriptions found in *TV Guide.* In a set of 20 such descriptions, 12 were manipulated so as to feature either younger or older adults as the main character(s).[4] Each participant evaluated six shows with younger adult main characters and six with older adult main characters, as well as eight distractor shows. Participants rated their anticipated viewing frequency of each of these shows on a 4-point scale (Never Watch; Watch Rarely; Watch Now and Again, Watch Regularly). These ratings were pooled to create an overall preference measure — how much they preferred six "young" shows over six "old" shows. In line with previous research, there was an overall preference for the artificial shows featuring younger characters over the artificial shows featuring older characters. The overall value of the preference measure for young shows was positive ($M = .22$) and significantly different from zero ($t = 7.12$, $df = 225$, $p<.001$).

Age Identification. A shortened version of Garstka, Branscombe, and Hummert's (1997) Age Group Identification Scale (AGIS) was administered. This scale contained nine items measuring the extent to which an individual's age group membership is important to them (e.g., "I am proud to be a member of my age group"; Cronbach's alpha = .91). These items and all described

henceforth were evaluated on 5-point Likert scales (strongly agree — strongly disagree).

Self-esteem. Personal self-esteem was measured with a shortened version of Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (6 items, Cronbach's alpha = .83). Collective self-esteem was measured with four items from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) collective self-esteem scale measuring the esteem in which individuals believe their group memberships are held. In the current instance the questions asked specifically about age group memberships (e.g., "In general, others respect the age group that I am a member of;" Cronbach's alpha = .82).

Gratifications. Existing measures of television viewing gratifications were reviewed (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1993; Conway & Rubin, 1991; Rubin, 1981; 1983). Nine featured items that appeared to measure social identity gratifications as conceived in the current paper. Hence, 11 items were written that were anticipated to access viewing motivations grounded in group identity, and particularly age identity (e.g., "I watch television because I enjoy watching young people like me"; "I watch television to see people who I identify with"). One aim was to determine whether items dealing with social identity gratifications in general (i.e., without specific group targets) would operate similarly to those measuring age identity gratifications specifically. These items were embedded among 40 traditional gratifications questions from existing measures.

Results

To address RQ_1, the 51 items measuring gratifications were factor analyzed using a principal components extraction and varimax rotation. Items with extremely low communalities, items displaying double loadings, and items failing to load on any factors were removed. The remaining 43 items revealed 10 factors, accounting for 65.4% of the variance in the scale.[5] The first factor to emerge (eigenvalue = 7.47, 19.2% of variance) consisted of seven social identity gratifications items (the other four were dropped for reasons described above). The items constituted an internally consistent scale (Cronbach's alpha = .88).[6] This scale is named the age identity gratifications (AIG) scale. The remaining factors reflected traditional media gratifications: Entertainment/amusement (10.6% of variance; alpha = .86); Habit (8.2% of variance; alpha = .80); Learning (6.8% of variance; alpha = .78); Relaxation (4.3% of variance; alpha = .80); Excitement (3.7% of variance; alpha = .71); Alleviating loneliness (3.5% of variance; alpha=.85); Keeping up with the news (3.3% of variance; alpha = .60); Escape (3.0% of variance; alpha = .60); Providing material for talking to friends (2.8% of variance; alpha = .79). Scales were computed representing each factor.

Bivariate correlations of the AIG scale with the other gratification scales were examined. It was significantly correlated with seven of the nine other scales (all except habit and keeping up with the news). The correlations were small to moderate (significant correlations ranged from $r = .18$ with the "alleviating loneliness" gratification, to $r = .30$ with the "learning" gratification). The level of intercorrelation is similar to that among the other gratification scales (58% of the correlations between the other scales were significant).

The second research question was investigated by examining a correlation coefficient between the AGIS measure of age identification and the AIG scale. The correlation was significant (r = .25, $p<.001$). Individuals who expressed a stronger identification with their age group also tended to express a desire to view television for age identity-linked reasons. That said, the association is only of moderate size, with about 6% shared variance between the measures, hence it is clear that these are not redundant concepts.

RQ_3 is concerned with links between AIG and television viewing behavior. Bivariate correlations were calculated between the AIG scale and the measures of television viewing. The AIG measure correlated significantly with reported viewing of the Fox cluster (r = .33, $p<.001$) and the NBC/MTV cluster (r = .28, $p<.001$). In order to control for alternative explanations of these correlations, two regression analyses examined the Fox and NBC/MTV television viewing clusters as dependent variables. In hierarchical regressions, respondent age and sex were entered, followed by nine gratification scales (all except the AIG scale), followed by the age identification and AIG measures.[7] A significant relationship between AIG and the two television viewing clusters remained after all controls (Fox cluster: Beta = .17; sr^2 = .03, $p<.01$; NBC/MTV cluster: Beta = .20; sr^2 = .04, $p<.01$). The scale explains unique variance in viewing choices, even when demographic factors, other gratifications, and identity are controlled. Age identification also predicted viewership after all other controls (Fox cluster: Beta = .15; sr^2 = .02, $p<.05$; NBC cluster: Beta = .13; sr^2 = .01, $p<.05$). Neither age identification nor age identity gratifications was associated with anticipated viewing of the experimentally manipulated show descriptions.

Regression analyses examined the links suggested in RQ_4. These analyses attempted to predict age identification, personal self-esteem, and collective self-esteem from measures of television preference, the order in which the measures were presented (i.e., television first or identity/self-esteem first), and the interaction between television preference and order of presentation.[8] A single significant result relevant to RQ_4 emerged. Age identification was significantly predicted by the interaction between viewing preferences for the artificially constructed younger shows and the order of the measures (Beta = -.17; sr^2 = .03, $p<.05$). Specifically, the relationship between initial ratings of age identification and later expressed desire to view shows featuring younger characters was not significant (and negative: r = -.14, $p>.05$). However, when age identification was rated *after* having rated desire to view the shows, a significant positive relationship emerged (r = .19, $p<.05$). Individuals who displayed a stronger preference for shows featuring characters of their own age later displayed increased identification with their own age group.

Discussion

This research has introduced a reliable measure of social identity gratifications. Preliminary evidence of the measure's validity has been provided. In particular, the measure is associated with age identity, and independently predicts television viewing preferences. Additional tests will be required to fully assess the measure's validity.

The current analysis demonstrated that age identification and age identity gratifications (AIG) predict television *viewing*, particularly of shows featuring casts of similar age to respondents and themes close to respondents' experience. The social identity measures maintained their predictive ability when traditional dimensions of gratifications were simultaneously controlled. At one level this link may seem self-evident. Respondents seek to view individuals with similar characteristics to themselves. However, the links from age identification and AIG to viewing indicate that this is more than a simple universal desire to view characters similar to oneself (Atkin, 1985; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). The desire varies with individual variation in endorsement of social identity measures. Hence, this result supports the idea that social identity reinforcement is sought by more highly identified viewers, but not by those less strongly identified.[9]

The research has implications for the SIT literature. Previously, social identity has been shown to influence interpersonal and group behavior (Bourhis & Giles, 1977; Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Garrett, Giles, & Coupland, 1989; Giles & Johnson, 1986; Oakes & Turner, 1980). The current analysis indicates that group identification is also associated with reasons individuals give for seeking out particular media experiences. Further, one link was found from the preference for (artificially constructed) shows featuring younger characters to age identification. Those who expressed a stronger preference for the younger shows appeared to gain increased age identification as a result: Television viewing choices may serve identity reinforcement functions. The mere act of making a viewing choice may enhance one's sense of belonging in a group and be important to overall self-concept. Actual viewing may result in more substantial effects.

No evidence was found for self-esteem benefits from electing to view particular shows. This may be a function of the experimental task. Selecting television shows for viewing is not the same as viewing those shows. Viewing a show might yield more subtle outcomes predicted by social identity theory. We should also entertain the possibility that identity processes in dealing with the media are somewhat different from those operating in interpersonal contexts. Outcomes from an identity based television selection may not reflect SIT's traditional social comparison/self-esteem link, but rather a more basic solidarity/affiliation effect.[10]

The study reflects a theoretic orientation to media use that is still in its infancy. Tools for assessing social identity gratifications are still being developed, and measurement instruments for age identification have only recently been validated (Garstka et al., 1997). Theory from social psychology and mass communication is relevant and useful for this research, yet neither is a perfect fit, and further accommodations will be necessary. This process is inevitable when dealing with two theories that are each grounded in the assumption that individuals are creative and flexible in interacting with their worlds. Some contributions of the current paper to future research are outlined below.

First, a measurement tool has been developed that is reliable and demonstrates initial validity in predicting reports of behavior and other established measures. In collaboration with content analytic work examining character demographics and youth-based themes in television programming, the measure might enable fine-grained predictions of age identity-based television

viewing behavior. By adapting the measure to other group memberships it might also be possible to identify additional groups for which media use is an activity with relevance or importance to social identity (as it seems to be among the young), as well as groups for which social identity gratifications are not salient (see Lull, 1985; Williams, Coupland, Folwell, & Sparks, 1997).

Second, future research might examine the *consequences* of social identity-driven television viewing. To what extent will we be able to identify specific outcomes associated with viewing the shows that are associated with these social identity gratifications? The current work has provided some preliminary indications of such effects, for instance, the finding of increased age identification after making age-based viewing choices. Research examining consequences of actually *viewing* as opposed to simply expressing viewing preferences is likely to uncover more dramatic effects.

Third, this research suggests future developments in examining viewers' gratification ratings across all dimensions, both social identity and traditional. It may be possible to uncover particular groups of viewers who share gratification "profiles," and hence to understand the ways in which social identity gratifications interact with other sought gratifications (e.g., entertainment or learning). In combination with information on viewing patterns, this might lead us toward more profound understandings of how our multiple needs and identities interact in the sphere of media use.

Fourth, the social identity approach suggests new hypotheses that can be investigated. How do viewing preferences change under conditions of threat to the ingroup? Does perceived ingroup vitality influence viewing choices (Giles et al., 1977)? Such questions may be important to programmers in terms of generating marketing appeals for shows. Also, the answers to such questions will provide more fine-grained understanding of precisely when group-based gratifications influence viewing choices. Relatedly, the current research may offer insight to those interested in the effects of television viewing on prejudice and discrimination. According to SIT, prejudice towards *out*groups is a function of identification with *in*groups. The extent to which ingroup identifications are strengthened or threatened by media portrayals may ultimately help us understand prejudicial outcomes of media consumption.

Finally, we need to consider situations in which group members may seek out *negative* messages about their group in order to fulfill positive social identity gratifications.[11] For instance, minority ethnic group members may seek apparently racist portrayals to provide themselves ammunition with which to attack establishment policies, or to obtain solidarity with other "jointly oppressed" people. Individuals with strong political orientations may seek messages from the "other side" to mock the perspective or rehearse counter-arguments (see Cotton, 1985; Lowin, 1969). Such phenomena are not contrary to the predictions of SIT, however, they speak to more complex ways in which we must conceptualize group-based gratifications in order to develop this perspective.

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Notes

[1] I am grateful to three anonymous reviewers and the editor for insightful comments.

[2] In an ideal situation, a more diverse sample would be used to examine age-based viewing choices. However, it should be noted that the current in-vestigation was focused on variation in viewing choices based on differences in identification *within* a similar-aged group of individuals. To that extent, the use of a narrow age sample provides a reasonable test of the   research questions under consideration (see Blumler, 1985, p. 54). Whether the current findings extend to other groups is an important question for future research.

[3] Ten shows were removed from the analysis because of very low viewing ratings among the respondents.

[4] For example, the following show description was provided. "*Night Life*: Jeff Cooper quit the police force after one year because he accidentally killed his partner. At age 23, he takes a job as a late night radio talk show host. He spends his night time hours talking to psycho hookers and desperate stalkers." Half of the subjects were randomly assigned to this version, and half to a ver-sion in which "age 23" was changed to "age 62." In all other respects the two descriptions were identical. Use of this type of show description is not un-

usual in mass communication research (see Atkin, 1985; Harwood, 1997; Krcmar & Cantor, 1997; Wakshlag, Vial, & Tamborini, 1983).

[5]The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett test of sphericity both indicated that factor analysis was appropriate (KMO=.82; Bartlett=3833.22, $p<.001$). The cases to variables ratio was not ideal (5.25:1), however it was acceptable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1992). Full details of these analyses including specific items loading on each factor are available from the author.

[6]The items that contributed to this factor were: "Because the characters are like people I know," "Because I enjoy watching people at my time of life," "To see people who I identify with," "To see people in similar situations to those I experience," "Because I enjoy watching people who are like me," "Because I enjoy watching young people like me," "To see young people in situations like those I experience."

[7]These gratifications scales were computed from factor scores rather than summing individual items.

[8]In line with the recommendations of Aiken and West (1991), the predictor variables were standardized before computing the interaction term. This removes the problem of inherent multicollinearity in interaction terms computed from unstandardized predictors. The interaction term was entered into the regression equation after the "main effect" predictor variables.

[9]Previous experimental research demonstrating that younger adults prefer shows featuring characters of their own age was replicated. However, no simple effects were found linking these preferences to age identification or age identity gratifications. Given that such links emerged in preferences for real shows, three explanations can be suggested for the lack of findings here. First, it is possible that these fake show descriptions are insufficiently "vivid" for the respondents, and more subtle effects are supposed. None of the shows received particularly high anticipated viewing (highest anticipated viewing rating was a mean of 2.22 on the scale: 1 = would never watch, 4 = would watch regularly). Second, it is possible that identity gratifications are only realized in the act of viewing. While retrospective accounts of actual viewing may not reveal such a pattern because respondents have not yet realized the gratifications. Third, identity gratifications will probably be realized in part as a function of a show's themes and settings, not purely its demographics. Hence, while younger adults can predict that they will enjoy shows featuring characters of their own age more than those featuring adults (a "mere demographic similarity" effect: Hoffner & Cantor, 1991), additional features may be required for identity issues to play a major role (e.g., age centered themes).

[10]Hogg and Abrams (1993) note that in certain circumstances social contact itself constitutes a reward, and that through it we may receive other rewards such as praise, social support, or reduction of uncertainty. The act of making television viewing choices may result in reaching a state of increased security about one's place within a group. In the media viewing context, reducing uncertainty may be more important than arbitrating group status. It should be noted that recent reviews suggest the importance of self-esteem to the SIT framework has been overplayed relative to the intention of the theory's developers (Turner & Bourhis, 1996).

[11]I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting closer attention to such phenomena.