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ABSTRACT

To measure Denver viewers' parasocial tendencies (inclinations to establish vicarious relationships) with TV news personalities, a study conducted a telephone survey in the Denver metropolitan area in October and November, 1987. The study examined viewer reactions to four local stations' "news teams" and individual news "personalities," focusing strictly on viewership of their primary newscasts, and using a parasocial framework, developed by Rebecca B. Rubin, consisting of 20 statements tapping parasocial interaction in TV news. Prior to the interviewing, a pretest using a similar survey was conducted, involving residents of Athens, Ohio. For the Denver survey, 800 phone numbers were selected at random and 303 valid responses were obtained. Findings revealed a high correlation between news team parasocial interaction and viewership, with news teams having the greatest numbers of viewers also evoking the greatest parasocial interaction. Yet although audience members conceded their parasocial inclinations, they did not discriminate well between the personalities, possibly indicating that TV news parasocial interaction is team-centered. (Five tables of data are included, and 38 footnotes are appended.) (MM)

PARASOCIAL INTERACTION AND LOCAL TV NEWS:

PERCEPTIONS OF NEWS TEAMS AND NEWS PERSONALITIES IN DENVER

by

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Parasocial interaction maintains that some audience members establish vicarious relationships with TV personalities. It was first discussed in 1956 by psychologists Horton and Wohl, who reported that subjects created "friendships" with people they saw on TV.[1] Later, researchers found that parasocial reactions to TV entertainers involved many of the steps felt to exist in actual interpersonal communication. In 1979, though, the concept took on different dimensions when Mark Levy wrote of parasocial interaction in TV news viewing.[2] Today, several studies later, parasocial interaction is a vital new thrust in the field of journalism, one that may unlock answers to elusive scholarly questions about the purposes served by TV news. Parasocial interaction is a roadway into the still-puzzling realm of the TV news personality, something very important as each day 100 million Americans view TV news programs, and virtually all news programs rely on personalities.[3]

This study represents the first attempt to further parasocial interaction in a formal TV news market setting, testing a complete array of actual TV stations and personalities, and drawing on available market data. Denver was chosen as the market, in part because it offered some advantages to an exploratory study, but mainly because trends and factors were considered typical of other markets. The study attempts to clarify items that might reflect parasocial interaction, as a step toward determining if they influence news content and conveyance. The study distinguishes between parasocial inter-

action evoked by individual "personalities" and collectively as "news teams." The study also seeks to determine if parasocial interaction is related to the popularity of newscasts. As noted, the study is exploratory, with the parasocial "instrument" still in a state of development and refinement.

The parasocial/TV news concept assumes there are inherent similarities between TV news programs and much-studied soap operas, situation comedies and talk shows. These programs feature one or more personalities whose appearances are regular events, continuing into the foreseeable future. Above all, the TV medium allows the viewer to make a choice; once a program is tuned in, the viewer is not obliged to remain attentive or tune in again.

These TV program characteristics resemble factors used in interpersonal communication to understand "bonding." It is assumed that the closer the bond, the greater the prospect for communication. In interpersonal communication, individuals have a choice in the degree to which they advance relationships. Newcomb's 1956 reinforcement theory maintains relationships are rooted in attraction and grow during comfortable and rewarding encounters.[4] In 1973, Altman and Taylor discuss how a bond can develop with repeated "interaction,"[5] while Berger and Calabrese conclude, in 1975, that "increased certainty" is important to the process.[6] Clatterbuck, in 1979, views "confidence" in the other person as an attribute in the interpersonal bond.[7]

In parasocial study the same assumptions apply, but it begins as a one-way proposition, an appeal from the personality to the viewer, demanding nothing from the viewer in return. Parasocial interaction is a measure, however large or small, of how much the viewer wants to complete the interaction and advance an actual one-way appeal into a vicarious two-way relationship.

In 1983, after studying soap opera viewing, Whetmore and Kielwasser write that "increased understanding" of media figures builds with additional exposures over time, as in interpersonal friendships.[8] Rubin and McHugh observe in

1987 that relationship development with a media persona is a complex ongoing "function of attraction."[9] In these studies, parasocial interaction is characterized as something especially pleasing and enjoyable to the viewer. Media uses and gratifications studies by Weibe, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur and Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch find TV failing as a purely interpersonal device, but note that response to one-way appeals helps explain TV use.[10] Although parasocial study has involved shut-ins, these studies show it does not have to be confined to those bound to their TVs. Many findings affirm what Horton and Wohl said in 1956: "Ideally, the performer should have 'heart,' should be 'sincere'; his performance should be 'real' and 'warm.'" The audience responds by "rewarding the persona's 'sincerity' with 'loyalty.'"[11]

Specific studies of news personalities have been scattered, but findings emphasize the prominence of personalities in TV news programs. In 1969, Cathcart claims the newscaster is the dominant outward element in a newscast.[12] Shosteck (1973) concludes that recruitment of attractive personalities can lead to "greater influence of [a] station as a news and public affairs source."[13] Sanders and Pritchett (1971) discuss physical criteria, including hair color and necktie design, arguing that visual and nonverbal characteristics help determine the newscaster a viewer will select.[14]

Importantly, these early news personality studies pose a question for journalism theory and methodology, which parasocial interaction greatly underscores. A traditional view depicts news personalities as "presenters" of the news, not journalistic elements unto themselves. Theorists McQuail and Tunstall consider the newspaper the "archetype as well as the prototype of all modern [news] media."[15] Accordingly, many TV news studies use approaches that cut across different media; studies published in 1986 and 1987 examine story focus, complexity and source credibility as factors shaping the comprehension of TV news material.[16] Yet, the parasocial concept suggests the news person-

ality may be fundamentally enmeshed in the process, quite unlike a newspaper reading experience. For example, a personality's facial expressions and tone of voice could influence perception of story content, two of many parasocial possibilities. Parasocial research offers some evidence that TV news may differ from the "newspaper as archetype" model, and that studies linked to viewers' perceptual activity may be hampered without some consideration of the personalities the viewer encounters.

These prospects are discussed in four studies to date that directly test TV news for parasocial interaction. Levy's 1979 study concludes that viewers "increase their exposure in order to increase their 'contact' with the news persona," such that some might "deliberately manipulate" presentations to increase parasocial response.[17] In 1980, Palmgren, Wenner and Rayburn discuss "realism" associated with an anchor's nonverbal cues (facial expressions, tone of voice, rate of speaking) and maintain viewers isolate two types of information in a TV news program, "issue-related" and "social," which tend to be comprehended based on interpersonal gratifications sought.[18] Houlberg's 1984 study isolates several newscaster/parasocial attributes, expressed as "daily visits" and "everyday friends."[19] In 1985, Rubin, Perse and Powell successfully test a framework for locating parasocial interaction based on what might be called "warm and fuzziness," such things as "naturalness," "friendliness" and "attractiveness."[20] The Rubin framework is the primary methodological component of the Denver study, and will be explained further.

Although the Levy and Houlberg studies rely on defined local markets, TV news/parasocial studies thus far have not operated within the confines of an actual TV market situation For example, Levy does not distinguish between local and network viewing and does not specific names; the more-focused Houlberg study likewise does not break out specific personalities and news teams. Parasocial theory-making demands this, because viewers react to real

people, based on real alternatives available to them in a given market. Further, an impelling TV news research question is the supposed link between news personality traits and a station's ability to attract viewers, which can in turn influence news content.[21] It is a question tailor-made to parasocial study, yet one addressable only in a market-based probe. In addition, market orientation helps spell out other implications vital to the field today. For example, Stone estimates the median salary of main anchors in the top 25 markets to be $130,000 per year, and $85,000 in the next 25.[22] Forbes, in 1981 and 1983, finds numerous local anchors in the half-million to one-million dollar annual salary range, and it speculates on their success in building newscast ratings.[23] Thus, the TV news industry may already be guided by parasocial concepts.

This study attempts to measure Denver viewers' parasocial tendencies in two ways: by their reactions to the stations' "news teams" and their individual "personalities." Existing knowledge of TV news parasocial interaction promotes three research questions relevant in a market-oriented study. They are tested in the following hypotheses:

(1) Using the Rubin framework, some news teams and personalities will elicit noticeable levels of parasocial interaction.

(2) Viewers will show different levels of parasocial interaction toward different stations' news teams, such that the highest-rated news teams will have the highest parasocial interaction.

(3) Viewers will show different levels of parasocial interaction toward different personalities appearing on the same news team.

These hypotheses represent worthy tests because the vitality of the parasocial/TV news concept rests, in a big way, on real world examinations.

Method

The study consisted of a telephone survey in the Denver metropolitan area in October-November, 1987. Denver offered several market characteristics conducive to the study. Ratings data suggested that the market was in a state of stability after a period (1982-85) of substantial "sampling" and switching of TV news loyalties. During this period, KUSA-TV and KMGH-TV lost large portions of their audiences, while KCNC-TV had major gains. KWGN-TV, the independent station, saw some increases in its alternatively-positioned newscast. Between 1986-87, however, there were no major changes in viewership.[24]

This patten of sampling was important because respondents were tested based on news programs they said they watched most. High sampling potentially reflected both a viewer's knowledge of alternative personalities and the prospect of making a decision based on parasocial criteria. In addition, Denver viewers had many opportunities to encounter different news personalities outside of news programs, in prime time and fringe "newsbriefs" and in station promotion. Personality promotion had been conducted on a mostly year-around basis by KCNC, KMGH and KUSA.

Also helpful was the stability of the anchor teams on Denver's primary newscasts. The KUSA and KCNC personalities had worked together as primary anchor teams for over three years. Two of the KMGH personalities (No. 1 anchor and Weatherperson) had been in place for three years, the others for almost two years after considerable exposure on KUSA. KUSA and KMGH used the same team on both its 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. news. During the survey period, KCNC had recently debuted a new No. 2 anchor on its 5 p.m. newscast. Only the original anchor was tested because of her continuance on the 10 p.m. news and her earlier prominence at 5 p.m. The three-member KWGN news team had been in tact for one year. (More elaborate descriptions of the news teams and personalities appear in note 30.)

Although Denver featured some special characteristics, important to the study's generalizability was evidence it does not dramatically differ from other markets. Denver possesses an average demographic mix, and is close in size to several other medium to large markets.[25] Because of this, Denver is a popular test market for products and services; Nielsen used Denver to test its "people meter" and Arbitron selected Denver for initial trials of its ScanAmerica service, which compares product purchases with TV viewing.[26] As for news sampling, news promotion is common in most markets, providing evidence viewers in general are familiar with personalities on alternate stations.[27] Anchor stability in Denver does not greatly exceed that of other markets; Stone in 1986 finds local TV news operations hiring roughly one new anchor per year.[28] Perhaps most important, Denver's newscasts are structured the same as those in most large and small markets across the nation, with a familiar dual anchor-sports-weather format, and numerous situations in which personalities appear individually and interact collectively.

The parasocial framework of Rubin et al. consists of 20 statements tapping parasocial interaction in TV news. Respondents were asked to react to each statement based on a five-point scale, with "1" representing Strongly Disagree; "2"-Disagree; "3"-Neutral or Don't Know; "4"-Agree and "5"-Strongly Agree. The parasocial framework is discussed in the following section.

Prior to the interviewing, a pre-test was conducted involving residents of Athens, Ohio. Personalities familiar to that audience were substituted for the Denver names. One of the Rubin items, "I am not satisfied when I get my news from a newscaster other than this person," was dropped, leaving a framework of 19 items. The original questionnaire required respondents to name members of their "most watched" news team based on unaided recall. As pre-test respondents had little difficulty naming correct personalities, unaided recall was eliminated as an identification check, and respondents were

read names of the personalities and, in some cases, given brief descriptions. Interviews with respondents who could not adequately identify all members of appropriate news teams were terminated.

Eight-hundred phone numbers were selected at random by a computer, using prefixes appearing in the Denver Metropolitan Telephone Directory. Because of a large number of exchanges (240), every fourth and fifth exchange was selected. Information on numbers of hookups in each exchange was unavailable from the phone company; phone numbers were generated in proportion to the size of the county in which they were taken.[29] Each of the counties in the Denver metropolitan area (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver and Jefferson) were sampled. Business numbers were excluded, and working numbers lacking an answer on the first call were dialed one additional time. Most of the calls were made at night and on weekends. In all 303 valid responses were obtained, 176 (58 percent) were from females.

Interviewers consisted of graduates students at Ohio University and volunteers from the Denver Help Center. All had had some experience with phone interviewing, and all were given instructions on handling the survey, with explanations of items and descriptions of the news teams and personalities.[30] The Ohio students were shown video tapes of recent Denver newscasts. Approximately three-fourths of the completed interviews were done by the students.

The study focused strictly on viewership of the station's primary newscasts. For KCNC, KMGH and KUSA, these were programs appearing at 5-6:00 p.m. and 10-10:35 p.m. Monday through Friday. KWGN's primary newscast was a single program appearing between 9-9:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. Respondents were screened based on viewership of these newscasts; a respondent needed to watch at least two primary newscasts per week of that person's favored station. The sample was divided based on response to the question, "What station do you

watch most often for news?" Thus, there were separate sets of results for KWGN, KCNC, KMGH and KUSA.

Feedback Unlimited, Inc., a Denver-based TV news consulting firm, assisted in the supervision of the volunteers. It also obtained the newscast video tapes, relevant market information and Nielsen metered market reports from the period in which the interviewing took place.

The Parasocial Framework

Rubin draws from Levy, Palmgren et al., Houlberg and several non-TV news studies in formulating items for the parasocial framework.[3] The goal of the Rubin study was, in part, determining whether television reliance was a function of parasocial interaction. Local television news was selected as the unit of observation because of its "carefully created personae," with a note that "[n]ewscasters are often chosen less for their journalistic skills than for personality and style . . . ." The 20-item scale is a synthesis of 29 items derived through results of previous parasocial studies, with wording adapted for TV news viewing experiences. In the Denver study, some Rubin items were altered slightly to fit the context of the questionnaire. For example, "I find my favorite newscaster to be attractive" became "I find this person to be attractive," specifying an actual name. The 19 items used in the Denver study appear as part of Table 1.

The 19 items were of two types. Four items (Items 1-4) related to parasocial reaction to a news team, while 15 items (Items 5-19) related to personalities. During the interviewing, respondents were read Items 1-4, and scores were recorded for their favored station. Then, Items 5-19 were read, with each item followed by the personalities appearing on their favored station. Following Rubin's procedure, means of the one-through-five responses were considered measures of parasocial interaction.

Table 1 (Composite Analysis) provides a full-sample composite mean for each of the items based on all responses regardless of preferred station.

Table 2 (News Team Analysis) depicts parasocial interaction evoked separately by the four Denver news teams. To depict news team parasocial interaction, all 19 items were employed. In Items 5-19, those relating to the personalities, news team parasocial response was considered to be the mean of the resporses elicited separately by the personalities.

Table 3 (Personality Analysis) depicts parasocial interaction evoked separately by the 15 personalities, grouped by each of the four news teams. This analysis used only Items 5-19. Figures are identified as "News 1" and "News 2" (the news co-anchors, one such anchor appeared on KWGN), "Weather" and "Sports." Table 3 is presented in two parts.

Table 4 correlates results in Table 2 with Nielsen ratings data.

The four news team-specific items asked the respondent to react based on a "group" experience. Its dimensions included unity with the group, group friendship and effects of levity on group encounters. The group realm is important in local TV news, as often anchors present stories in tandem and/or interact with each other.

The 15 personality-specific items explore four important parasocial dimensions: idea coherence, physical qualities/attraction, passive bonding, and active bonding.

Idea Coherence is represented in Items 5, 6 and 7, in which respondents reacted to whether the personalities helped them make up their minds about news items and whether they compared their ideas with those they thought the personalities projected. Physical Qualities/Attraction, represented in Items 8, 9 and 10, tapped perceptions of voice, physical attractiveness and naturalness. Passive Bonding, represented in Items 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, probed the extent to which respondents had begun at least some semblance of a two-way

bond with the personality. Dimensions included friendship, companionship, empathy and withdrawal during the personality's absence.

Active Bonding, represented in Items 16, 17, 18 and 19, explored the extent to which the respondent went further in completing a two-way bond, such as physical response to the personality. Dimensions included talking to the personality during the newscast and the desire to actually meet the personality. Other dimensions involved supplemental "contact" with the personality, via newspaper stories and other programs in which they might appear.

With final scores in the form of means, expressed as numbers between one and five, consideration was given to the minimum score reflecting parasocial interaction. A score of 4.00 was ideally a minimum since it represented an aggregate "agree" response, although any score above 3.00 might reflect parasocial interaction since it would be above the neutral point (see Discussion). Analysis of results assumed a conservative interpretation, such that scores above 4.00 and 3.85 were bench marks of parasocial interaction.

Results

Hypothesis 1, the presence of parasocial interaction per se, and Hypothesis 2, relating news team parasocial interaction to audience ratings, were retained. Evidence for Hypothesis 3, pertaining to differences between personalities on the same news team, was not conclusive and was rejected.

Among the 303 completed responses, 120 said they watched KCNC most often, while 66 identified themselves with KMGH and 109 with KUSA. Only eight respondents said they watched KWGN most often. KWGN was excluded from the statistical analyses, although its results are presented for comparison.

Hypothesis 1 -- To test whether high levels of parasocial interaction were present per se, the Composite, News Team and Personality analyses were examined. In the Composite Analysis, there were 19 outcomes. Five of the items

had means of 3.85 or higher, with one above 4.00. Standard errors for each of the outcomes are included; all were within .14 of the tabled values. The mean across all items was 3.67, well above the neutral point. In the News Team Analysis, there were 57 outcomes, excluding KWGN. Of these, 20 of the items had means of 3.85 or higher, with 11 above 4.00. Across all items, KCNC viewers provided a mean of 3.84, KUSA had a mean of 3.82 and KMGH's mean was 3.12. Standard errors in the KCNC column were all within .15 of tabled values, those for KMGH were within +.20 and those for KUSA were within .16.

In the Personality Analysis, 61 of the 180 outcomes were equal to or in excess of 3.85. Fourteen of the items had means of 4.00 or higher. Standard errors for items among the KCNC personalities were all within .15 of tabled values, those for the KUSA personalities were all within .19 and those for the KMGH personalities were all within .16.

These outcomes provided an adequate indication that viewers in Denver respond to news personalities based on criteria established in the Rubin parasocial framework. Indeed, only six of the 57 news team outcomes and 21 of the 180 personality outcomes were below the neutral point of 3.00.

Hypothesis 2 -- The test of whether parasocial interaction was related to viewership involved two steps. A one-way ANOVA was performed based on the 19 items in the News Team Analysis to see if there were significant differences between the stations. This was successful ($F=45.18$, $df=2,56$, $p<.001$).

The means across all items for KCNC, KMGH and KUSA were analyzed in association with Nielsen data (Table 4). This was done in twice, based on the stations' 5-6:00 p.m. newscasts and the stations' 10-10:35 p.m. newscasts. A Pearson test of association was performed, with high correlations in each situation. The 5-6:00 p.m. newscast analysis resulted in a correlation of .98; the 10-10:35 p.m. newscast test had a correlation of .91.

This supported the proposition that stations with the highest viewership evoke the highest parasocial interaction.

Hypothesis 3 -- To determine if different levels of parasocial response were elicited by personalities on the same anchor team, a one-way ANOVA was performed based on the 15 items in the Personality Analysis. This was done for each station. The results were mixed. Significance was achieved for KUSA at the .05 level ($F=4.74$, $df=3,59$, $p<.05$). However, no significant differences were found between the mean scores of the KCNC and KMGH personalities. The results of this analysis were considered insufficient to support the hypothesis as initially proposed.

The procedure was checked for reliability by comparing responses to the "most watched station" question with the ratings data, which tap similar viewership dimensions. Assuming both were representative of the Denver market, a high correlation was expected. This was achieved, with correlations of .86 for the 5-6:00 newscast ratings and .75 for the 10-10:35 ratings.

TABLE 1. COMPOSITE RESULTS BY PARASOCIAL ITEM

	Mean	Stand Err
Item 1: Channel ___ shows me what the newscasters are like	3.96	.08
Item 2: When the newscasters joke around, it makes the news easier to watch	3.73	.11
Item 3: When I'm watching the newscast, I feel as if I'm part of the group	3.47	.11
Item 4: The newscasters make me feel comfortable, as if I'm with friends	3.76	.09
Item 5: When this person shows me how s/he feels about the news, it helps me make up my own mind about the news	3.41	.10
Item 6: I like to compare my ideas with what this person says	3.77	.10
Item 7: This person understands the kinds of things I want to know	3.85	.09
Item 8: I see this person as a natural, down-to-earth person	4.03	.08
Item 9: I like hearing the voice of this person in my home	3.95	.07
Item 10: I find this person to be attractive	3.74	.08
Item 11: I feel sorry for this person when s/he makes a mistake	3.31	.11
Item 12: This person keeps me company when the news is on television	3.70	.11
Item 13: I look forward to seeing this person on tonight's news	3.89	.09
Item 14: I miss this person when s/he is on vacation	3.55	.11
Item 15: I think this person is like and old friend	3.38	.11
Item 16: I would actually like to meet this person	3.67	.12
Item 17: I sometimes make remarks to this person	3.20	.14
Item 18: If this person appeared on another program, I would watch that program	3.46	.10
Item 19: If there were a story about this person in the newspaper, I would read it	3.89	.08
ALL ITEMS (N=303)	3.67	.12

TABLE 2: PARASOCIAL INTERACTION BY NEWS TEAM

	KWGN*	KCNC	KMGH	KUSA
Item 1: "Newscasters are like".....	3.86	4.05	3.64	4.07
Item 2: "Joke around"	3.63	3.78	3.28	3.95
Item 3: "Part of the group"	3.50	3.51	2.85	3.79
Item 4: "Feel comfortable"	3.13	3.82	3.16	4.09
Item 5: "Helps make up my mind"	2.84	3.59	3.01	3.49
Item 6: "Compare my ideas"	3.17	3.88	3.44	3.88
Item 7: "Understands"	3.66	4.00	3.36	3.99
Item 8: "Natural, down-to-earth".....	3.39	4.22	3.54	4.17
Item 9: "Like hearing voice"	3.78	4.12	3.36	4.13
Item 10: "Attractive"	3.11	4.05	3.11	3.83
Item 11: "Feel sorry/mistake"	2.80	3.35	3.10	3.44
Item 12: "Keeps me company"	3.67	3.85	3.16	3.78
Item 13: "Look forward to watch"	3.78	4.10	3.20	3.99
Item 14: "Miss person/vacation"	3.17	3.76	2.94	3.71
Item 15: "An old friend"	2.89	3.65	2.53	3.63
Item 16: "Meet the person"	3.17	3.93	2.96	3.85
Item 17: "Talk to person"	2.67	3.41	2.46	3.45
Item 18: "Watch person elsewhere".....	2.67	3.63	2.89	3.70
Item 19: "Read about person"	3.67	4.20	3.34	3.98
All Items	3.00 n=8	3.84 n=120	3.12 n=66	3.82 n=109

F=45.18, df=2,56, p<.001

*Results for KWGN were excluded in the statistical analysis because of low response. Results are presented for comparison only.

TABLE 3: PARASOCIAL INTERACTION BY PERSONALITY, Part 1

	KWGN*			KCNC			
	Nws1	Weat	Spts	Nws1	Nws2	Weat	Spts
Item 5	2.67	2.67	3.17	3.69	3.59	3.61	3.46
Item 6	3.17	3.17	3.17	3.94	3.86	3.83	3.85
Item 7	3.83	3.33	3.33	4.06	3.96	4.02	3.94
Item 8	3.50	3.33	3.33	4.33	4.18	4.32	4.03
Item 9	3.83	3.33	4.17	4.18	4.12	4.20	3.98
Item 10	3.33	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.13	4.17	3.91
Item 11	2.80	2.80	2.80	3.36	3.41	3.38	3.25
Item 12	3.67	3.67	3.67	3.91	3.87	3.86	3.77
Item 13	4.00	3.67	3.50	4.16	4.08	4.14	4.02
Item 14	3.33	3.00	3.17	3.86	3.75	3.83	3.60
Item 15	3.00	3.00	2.67	3.76	3.60	3.68	3.56
Item 16	3.50	3.00	3.00	3.97	3.92	3.94	3.88
Item 17	2.83	2.33	2.83	3.49	3.37	3.41	3.37
Item 18	2.83	2.33	2.83	3.75	3.59	3.63	3.56
Item 19	3.67	3.67	3.67	4.25	4.19	4.17	4.17
All Items	3.00	3.50	2.80	3.91	3.84	3.89	3.76
	N=6**	N=6	N=6	N=109	N=109	N=109	N=109

F=.85, df=3,59, nsd

*Results for KWGN were excluded in the statistical analysis because of low response. Results are presented for comparison only.

**"N" refers to questionnaires with response to all 15 items. Partial questionnaires were included in statistics.

Item 5: Helps make up my mind
Item 6: Compare my ideas
Item 7: Understands
Item 8: Natural, down-to-earth
Item 9: Like hearing voice
Item 10: Attractive
Item 11: Feel sorry/mistake
Item 12: Keeps me company
Item 13: Look forward to watch
Item 14: Miss person/vacation
Item 15: An old friend
Item 16: Meet the person
Item 17: Talk to person
Item 18: Watch person elsewhere
Item 19: Read about person

TABLE 3: PARASOCIAL INTERACTION BY PERSONALITY, Part 2

	KMGH				KUSA			
	Nws1	Nws2	Weat	Spts	Nws1	Nws2	Weat	Spts
Item 5	3.06	3.02	3.00	2.95	3.60	3.56	3.47	3.31
Item 6	3.48	3.54	3.33	3.40	3.94	3.88	3.79	3.89
Item 7	3.38	3.44	3.30	3.30	4.03	4.11	3.94	3.75
Item 8	3.57	3.78	3.42	3.40	4.39	4.26	4.18	3.86
Item 9	3.43	3.56	3.23	3.20	4.22	4.20	4.01	4.02
Item 10	3.27	3.32	2.73	3.11	3.97	3.96	3.74	3.63
Item 11	3.15	3.23	3.01	3.00	3.51	3.49	3.46	3.29
Item 12	2.95	2.97	2.89	3.84	3.85	3.80	3.70	3.76
Item 13	3.24	3.38	3.17	3.10	4.15	4.13	3.93	3.73
Item 14	2.92	3.11	2.86	2.87	3.95	3.84	3.62	3.44
Item 15	2.51	2.62	2.49	2.49	3.76	3.68	3.57	3.52
Item 16	3.00	3.17	2.74	2.84	3.99	3.94	3.69	3.72
Item 17	2.41	2.56	2.44	2.46	3.54	3.44	3.48	3.34
Item 18	2.79	3.02	2.88	2.87	3.98	3.75	3.56	3.52
Item 19	3.40	3.42	3.24	3.31	4.19	4.11	3.99	3.64
All Items	3.10	3.22	2.96	3.01	3.93	3.87	3.74	3.63
	N=66*	N=66	n=66	N=65	N=109	N=109	N=107	N=104
	F=1.68, df=3,59, nsd				F=3.41, df=3,59, p<.05			

*"N" refers to questionnaires with response to all 15 items. Partial questionnaires were included in statistics.

Item 5: Helps make up my mind
Item 6: Compare my ideas
Item 7: Understands
Item 8: Natural, down-to-earth
Item 9: Like hearing voice
Item 10: Attractive
Item 11: Feel sorry/mistake
Item 12: Keeps me company
Item 13: Look forward to watch
Item 14: Miss person/vacation
Item 15: An old friend
Item 16: Meet the person
Item 17: Talk to person
Item 18: Watch person elsewhere
Item 19: Read about person

TABLE 4: PARASOCIAL INTERACTION BY VIEWERSHIP

	5-6:00 Newscast		10-10:35 Newscast	
	Nielsen Rating*	Parasocial Interactn (All Items)	Nielsen Rating*	Parasocial Interactn (All Items)
KCNC	12.50	3.84	14.00	3.84
KMGH	6.00	3.12	8.00	3.12
KUSA	12.25	3.82	17.50	3.82
	r=.98		r=.91	

*The tabled rating figures represent the average of the Monday-Friday Nielsen metered estimates for the four weeks between Oct. 10-Nov. 6, 1987.

Discussion

Applying a tested framework in an actual TV news environment, evidence of parasocial interaction was found in numerous situations. Because it was stronger in some cases than others, important relationships could be studied. In Denver, news team parasocial interaction was highly correlated with viewership, with news teams evoking the greatest parasocial interaction having the greatest numbers of viewers.

Nevertheless, the role of personalities as members of news teams may be more complex than earlier parasocial literature indicates. The hypothesis anticipating different levels of parasocial interaction between the different personalities failed, and it may mean that TV news parasocial interaction is team-centered. Audience members conceded their parasocial inclinations, but did not discriminate well between the personalities.

Market study offers advantages to understanding team-centeredness in parasocial interaction because market-specific factors possibly contributing to it can be isolated. This can be shown in additional examination of the

data in Table 2, the News Team Analysis. An a posteriori Newman-Keuls test (Table 5) shows that the variance in Table 2 is mainly attributable to KMGH, while the superior results of KCNC and KUSA show little between-score variance. It appears there are qualities in the KCNC and KUSA presentations that have escaped KMGH. The market analysis suggests that these qualities, at least among these Denver stations, are not inherent in format, time of program, longevity of the personalities on the news teams or unfamiliarity of news teams on alternate stations.

Some explanation may lie in the data. By comparing differences in parasocial scores between the three pairs of stations, it can be seen that three items, "like an old friend," "I'd like to meet the person," and "I talk to the person," explain much of the variation in the News Team Analysis (Table 6). In each case, the KMGH scores differed from the other stations by .90 or more, while the KCNC-KUSA differences were negligible. In addition, KCNC and KUSA news teams apparently have identical abilities to show the viewer what they are like, elicit the viewer's understanding, promote comparison of ideas and attract the viewer based on vocal qualities. Interestingly, there were no additional insights when comparisons were made based on the item categories, those of team, idea coherence, physical qualities/attraction, passive and active bonding; separate ANOVAs were performed with each significant at .01.

These findings may have as much value in future parasocial research as the absolute scores because they help address the proposed connection between parasocial interaction and total viewership. It is important that Denver viewers, across the board, place high regard on voice and down-to-earth qualities and the ability to know what the newscasters are like. Yet, focusing on item-by-item comparisons in the News Team Analysis offers some explanation why parasocially-strong stations succeed. In that regard, this study does not overcome the limitations endemic in a case study approach; it

has assumed Denver is typical of other markets, with randomization intended to reflect typical responses. However, no two news personalities, news teams or markets are fully alike, nor are the audiences who watch them.

TABLE 5: DIFFERENCES AMONG MEANS

		KMGH	KUSA	KCNC
KMGH	3.12	--	.70*	.72*
KUSA	3.82		--	.02
KCNC	3.84			--

*p<.01, Newman-Keuls multiple comparison test.

TABLE 6: DIFFERENCES IN PARASOCIAL SCORES BY NEWS TEAM

	KCNC KMGH	KMGH KUSA	KUSA KCNC		KCNC KMGH	KMGH KUSA	KUSA KCNC
Item 1	.61	.63	.02	Item 11 ...	.25	.34	.11
Item 2	.50	.67	.18	Item 12 ...	.69	.62	.11
Item 3	.66	.94	.17	Item 13 ...	.90	.79	.11
Item 4	.66	.93	.27	Item 14 ...	.82	.77	.05
Item 5	.58	.48	.10	Item 15 ..	1.12	1.10	.02
Item 6	.44	.44	.00	Item 16 ...	.97	.90	.08
Item 7	.64	.63	.01	Item 17 ...	.95	.99	.04
Item 8	.68	.63	.05	Item 18 ...	.74	.81	.07
Item 9	.76	.77	.01	Item 19 ...	.86	.64	.22
Item 10 ...	.94	.72	.19				

Item 1: Newscasters are like
Item 2: Joke around
Item 3: Part of group
Item 4: Feel comfortable
Item 5: Helps make up my mind
Item 6: Compare my ideas
Item 7: Understands
Item 8: Natural, down-to-earth
Item 9: Like hearing voice
Item 10: Attractive

Item 11: Feel sorry/mistake
Item 12: Keeps me company
Item 13: Look forward to watch
Item 14: Miss person/vacation
Item 15: An old friend
Item 16: Meet the person
Item 17: Talk to person
Item 18: Watch person elsewhere
Item 19: Read about person

This initial market approach to parasocial interaction turned up several methodological stumbling blocks, which should be considered in future studies. Assuming sampling methods are adequate, there will be fewer responses from the station with the lowest ratings. Further, this study depended on Nielsen estimates, even though there were reliability questions due to Nielsen's conversion to "people meters"; the Nielsen figures were used because they were consistent with Arbitron estimates from a similar ratings period. This may not be the case in other markets. Another consideration is the timing of the research. Part of this study was conducted during a rating period, and an influx of station promotion may have heightened, in an abnormal way, a viewer's attentiveness to such things as personalities.

The Rubin framework functioned well, although it should not be regarded as the definitive parasocial/TV news tool as it stands. First, a five-point scale appears too coarse a measure; a seven or nine-point scale would allow a better determination of minimum parasocial interaction. Above all, the 20 Rubin items, although allowing a rich accounting of parasocial interaction for now, should inspire additional items, for more refined probing into specific areas. More team-oriented items are needed.

None of the items related to information conveyance, and this remains a challenge for journalism-oriented studies of parasocial interaction. This is need is emphasized in some of the study's subjective results. When given the "old friend" and "down-to-earth" statements, a dozen or so respondents said these aspects increased their attentiveness to news material. In ten or so cases, the "attractiveness" and "voice" items brought similar observations. A peculiarity of this study, but one symbolic of the way parasocial interaction can be articulated, concerned some partisan stories carried by one of the sports personalities during a football strike. At least twenty respondents said they were "mad" at this person, some feeling "betrayed," yet they con-

tinued to watch him, more attentive than ever to his material. Perhaps more revealing was the "vacation" item, as some respondents said they sometimes did not watch the news at all if their favorite personality was absent.

These subjective comments, although not generalizable, are of note because they are consistent with a conclusion offered by Rubin,

> Parasocial interaction . . . was linked positively with perceived television news realism and the use of local television news for information reasons. . . . Meaning for media consumers, then, is not inherent in the content and presentation of the news program, but is the result of perceptual activity within some audience members, who construe meaning out of the viewing experience.[32]

If a station's news team and personalities evoke little parasocial interaction, what are the motives for tuning in? Such stations may actually be recognized as being less parasocial-oriented and more information-oriented, allowing, perhaps, a distinction between "parasocial centered" viewers and "information centered" viewers. Still, motives for viewership may be found in such things as program lead-in or better signal reception. Content study of local TV news, in conjunction with parasocial study, may provide answers.

Another set of possibilities relate to the TV news personalities who are not anchors, such as reporters. Although appearing less prominently, reporters would meet the criteria for parasocial interaction, including regularity of appearance and prospect for future interaction. This would especially be true of the more-visible veteran and specialty reporters. Are reporters perceived as part of their news team, or because of their less prominent status, are they in a different category? If reporters evoke parasocial interaction, is it influenced by the fact they convey information from the scenes of news events? Are there differences stemming from live and taped formats? What are the relationships between reporters who do some anchoring (such as on weekends) with those who do not anchor?

There are many reasons why scholars should be attentive to the examination of news personalities. The role of the personality in TV news is often viewed critically. Movies, magazine articles and popular books, such as Ron Powers' The Newscasters, Barbara Matusow's The Evening Stars, Herbert Gans' Deciding What's News and P.H. Tannenbaum's Television News as Entertainment, insist personalities have instilled an "entertainment" orientation into local TV news.[33] Yet, there has been a much less intensive effort to approach these matters empirically. Indeed, much scholarly literature on television journalism is underpinned by combinations of the four popular books just cited.

Scholars who study TV news should also recognize the supreme position of the news personality in the scheme of industry priorities, and its possible effects. Future research may determine whether an anchor parasocially influences the conveyance and perception of information. However, a good argument can be made now that modern anchors influence another part of the news process, the gathering of information. This is because of their astronomical salaries. While local anchors often earn six-figure salaries, Stone, in 1986, finds median salaries among other news employees to be $16,000 or less in the top 50 markets.[34] Judy Flander writes in 1986 of stresses in local TV newsrooms, seen in many "shortages" and a need to "constantly push [people] to their limit and beyond."[35] At issue in 1987 were news revenue decreases, and at that year's Radio-Television News Directors Association annual convention, managers discussed overtime controls, curtailment of news-related travel, elimination of syndicated material, cancellation of spare wire services and reductions in telephone usage.[36] Little was said at the time about anchor salaries. Present trends suggest no change is ahead: in 1986 annual raises given anchors were 50 percent higher than those in the next-highest job category.[37]

These matters are especially relevant to scholars who teach broadcast journalism at the university level and prepare students for assimilation into the industry. It appears to be an industry that relies on personalities in its journalistic process. In Denver, at least, a safe assumption is that the personalities at KCNC and KUSA, and those associated with them, felt more job security and positive personal expectations than those at KMGH, due to the marked disparities in the ratings. Again, these were the personalities found to evoke the greatest parasocial interaction.

Parasocial interaction is one inroad into this lesser-lit area of the journalism field. Robinson and Levy, in the 1986 The Main Source, point to a "mythology surrounding [the TV news] influence on audiences." They challenge the popular belief that TV news is the most-used and most-believed source of news, emphasizing the difficulty in pinpointing the essence of TV journalism,

> Despite its obvious flaws, there is growing evidence that TV news can communicate certain types of information regularly to more persons than alternate information sources. Still, we need to know much more about the quantity and quality of the information that is, or could be, communicated by television. We need more insight into the purposes this information can serve for viewers.[36]

One purpose may involve parasocial interaction. The study does not argue that the desire for information, in and of itself, in not a motive for the selection of TV news. Nevertheless, it does argue that viewers may select TV news to maximize vicarious interaction with the personalities, something many people would find pleasing. To them, the television news experience may be something less like reading a newspaper and more like the spending of time each day with friends. Parasocial interaction may provide a richer and more accurate model of television journalism, something that touches the lives of 100 million people each day.

NOTES

[1] David Horton and Robert Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction," Psychiatry, 19:215-229 (1956).

[2] Mark R. Levy, "Watching TV News as Parasocial Interaction," Journal of Broadcasting, 23:69-80 (1979).

[3] John P. Robinson and Mark R. Levy, "Information Flow in Society," The Main Source (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986), p.13.

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[5] Irwin Altman and Dalmas A. Taylor, Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

[6] Charles R. Berger and Richard J. Calabrese, "Some Explorations in Initial Interaction and Beyond: Toward a Development Theory of Interpersonal Communication," Human Communication Research, 1:99-112 (1975).

[7] Glen W. Clatterbuck, "Attributional Confidence and Uncertainty in Initial Interaction," Human Communication Research, 5:147-157 (1979).

[8] Edward J. Whetmore and Alfred P. Kielwasser, "The Soap Opera Audience Speaks: A Preliminary Report," Journal of American Culture, 6(3):110-116 (1983).

[9] Rebecca B. Rubin and Michael P. McHugh, "Development of Parasocial Interaction Relationships," Journal of Broadcasting, 31:279-292 (1987).

[10] Gerhart Weibe, "Mass Media and Man's Relationship to His Environment," Journalism Quarterly, 50:426-32 (1973); S.J. Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur, "A Dependency Model of Mass Media Effects," and Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michae Gurevitch, "Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual," in Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart, eds., Inter/Media: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[11] Horton and Wohl, op. cit.

[12] William L. Cathcart, "Viewer Needs and Desires in Television Newscasters," Journal of Broadcasting, 16:55-62 (1969-70).

[13] Herschel Shosteck, "Factors Influencing Appeal of TV News Personalities," Journal of Broadcasting, 18:63-70 (1973-74).

[14] Keith P. Sanders and Michael Pritchett, "Some Influences of Appearance on Television Newscaster Appeal," Journal of Broadcasting, 15:293-300 (1987).

[15] See Denis McQuail, Mass Communication Theory (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984), p. 138.

[16] See Grace Ferrari Levine, "Learned Helplessness in Local TV News," Journalism Quarterly, 63:12-18 (1986); Larry L. Burriss, "How Anchors, Reporters and Newsmakers Affect Recall and Evaluation of Stories," Journalism Quarterly, 64:514-519 (1987); and Dan Berkowitz, "TV News Sources and News Channels: A Study in Agenda-Building," Journalism Quarterly, 64:508-13. (1987).

[17] Levy, op. cit.

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[20] Alan Rubin, Elizabeth M. Perse and Robert A. Powell, "Loneliness, Parasocial Interaction and Local Television News Viewing," Human Communication Research, 12:155-180 (1985).

[21] Ron Powers, The Newscasters. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

[22] Vernon A. Stone, "Salary Gains Range From Moderate to None," RTNDA Communicator, Feb., 1986, pp. 24-27.

[23] John A. Byrne, "If You're So Good, Why the Hell Are You In Topeka?" Forbes, Dec. 7, 1981, pp. 133-136 and Forbes, Apr. 25, 1983, pp. 15-16.

[24] This analysis is based on ratings data compiled by A.C. Nielsen and Arbitron, Inc., between 1981 and 1987, made available through Feedback Unlimited, Inc.

[25] For example, Denver had a per capita income in 1980 of $11,040 (compared with a national figure of $11,500), an 89 percent white population (compared to 88 percent nationally), an unemployment rate of 6.5 percent (7.5 percent). See World Almanac and Book of Facts 1988 (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1987).

[26] "Who Is Watching? Denver Answers the Big Question," Beyond Ratings, (Arbitron, Inc., publication), Nov., 1987, pp. 14-16.

[27] SRI Research, Inc., Report on audience viewing preferences in Spokane, Washington, Oct., 1984, Lincoln, Neb., Nov, 1984.

[28] Vernon Stone, "News Staffs Change Little in Size, RTNDA Communicator, Mar., 1986, pp. 14-15.

[29] See Seymour Sudman, Applied Sampling. (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 131-132.

[30] The following characterizations of the Denver news teams and personalities is adapted from Jean Bergantini Grillo, "Denver: A Rocky Mountain Duel for Viewers," View, Oct. 20, 1986, pp. 43-47 and input from Feedback Unlimit-

ed, the Denver consulting firm which assisted the research. KCNC featured a "fatherly" anchorman, a young, blonde anchorwoman, a "forceful and authoritative" male sports person and a "heartthrob" weatherman. KUSA featured two "consistent and established" but friendly male anchors, a "witty" male sportsperson and a "down home" weatherman known for produce he cultivated in a garden in the station's back lot. All KCNC and KUSA personalities were white. KMGH had a "youngish" white anchorman, a "no-nonsense" black anchorwoman, a "smiling, serene" male sports person and a "plain-faced" white weatherman. KWGN had three white males, a young "southern style" anchor, a "soothing" sports person and an "average looking" weatherman.

[31] Rubin et al., op. cit.

[32] Ibid.

[33] See Powers, op. cit.; Barbara Matusow, The Evening Stars, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983); Herbert Gans, Deciding What's News, (New York: Vintage Press, 1979); and P.H. Tannenbaum, The Entertainment Functions of Television, (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlebaum, 1980).

[34] Stone, "Salary Gains," op. cit.

[35] Judy Flander, "Pressure and Stress in the Newsroom, RTNDA Communicator, May, 1986, pp. 14-17.

[36] Bob Papper, "Stretching the News Dollar," RTNDA Communicator, Sept., 1987, pp. 14-15.

[37] Stone, "Salary Gains," op. cit.

[38] Robinson and Levy, op. cit., p. 31.