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Parasocial relationships with audiences' favorite celebrities: The role of audience and celebrity characteristics in a representative Flemish sample

Abstract: This article provides insight into one form of audience involvement with celebrities: parasocial relationships (PSR). To address several shortcomings in PSR research – focus on TV, confusion between PSI (parasocial interaction) and PSR, use of student samples, neglect of socio-demographic variables – a representative online survey was conducted with 1000 Flemish adults who indicated 382 celebrities as favorites. A new scale reveals that PSR contain two important elements: emotional connections and an analogy with social relationships. Confirming previous research, most favorite celebrities are male, and cultural proximity is especially important for older respondents. In one combined model, respondents' and celebrities' (socio-demographic) characteristics are included as potential PSR predictors. This model nuances previous research and reveals that people who are male, older, more lowly-educated, and interested in celebrity news have stronger PSR. Further, stronger PSR are found for local and religious, political, sports, and music celebrities than for film celebrities.

Keywords: parasocial relationships, favorite celebrity, analogy to social relationships, emotional connection, cultural proximity

1 Introduction

Contemporary Western societies are characterized by celebrities' omnipresence, widely acknowledged in celebrity studies (Marshall, 2006; Rojek, 2001; Turner,

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2004). These celebrities do not just provide entertainment or gossip, but fulfil various social roles as audience members feel involved with celebrities. This ranges from fandom (Sandvoss, 2005) and identification (Cohen, 2009) to para-social interaction (PSI) or parasocial relationships (PSR) (Giles, 2002; Horton and Wohl, 1956). The latter two are the most widespread and influential forms of audience-celebrity involvement (Giles, 2002; Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm, 2006; Tian and Hoffner, 2010) and can impact audiences' information processing, attitudes, and behavior (Boon and Lomore, 2001; Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes, 2005). Despite the considerable number of PSI/PSR studies, they still show important shortcomings: First, they often focus on television celebrities whereas contemporary celebrity culture includes a variety of celebrity domains; second, although distinctive concepts, PSI and PSR are often used interchangeably; third, most studies use college student samples; and, fourth, socio-demographic variables are rarely addressed in PSI/PSR studies.

This study aims to contribute, first, by looking at a wide range of celebrities. It asks survey respondents about their favorite celebrity, without domain-related limitations. This allows for an analysis of favored celebrities' gender, domain, and nationality. While audience members can have multiple favorites, the focus on one preferred celebrity allows a more in-depth examination of PSR in a manner that is still manageable for research. Celebrity preferences are analyzed with regard to respondents' gender, age, and education, addressing the fourth shortcoming described above. Second, the study wishes to understand the nature of long-term PSR – rather than short-term PSI – and the relationship between audience members' gender, age, education, and celebrity news interest and celebrities' gender, domain, and nationality. To this end, an online questionnaire was completed by a representative sample of the Flemish (northern part of Belgium) adult population (N = 1000),[1] hereby addressing the limitation of college student samples. The survey data allow us to investigate respondents' favorite celebrities, the nature of PSR, and its strength as predicted by celebrity and respondents' characteristics in one model.

Further, this study aims to meet the need for "a commonly used, theory-driven, empirically-tested, coherent measure of PSR" (Hartmann, Stuke, and Daschmann, 2008, p. 27). There are scales to measure PSI (Auter and Palm-green, 2000; Rubin and Perse, 1987) – "asymmetrical interactions that take place as situational processes [...] during media exposure" (Hartmann et al., 2008, p. 25) – but these are not ideal for PSR – "one-sided interpersonal rela-

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tionships that [...] audiences establish with media characters" (Hartmann et al., 2008, p. 25). Furthermore existing PSR scales are limited to TV personalities (Bocarnea and Brown, 2007) or sportsmen (Hartmann et al., 2008). This contribution therefore combines items of the existing scales and composes a new scale to measure PSR with any celebrity type. By investigating celebrity preferences and PSR, this article provides insight into the relevance of celebrity culture in audiences' everyday lives.

2 Celebrities: Parasocial interaction versus parasocial relationships

In this article, celebrity is conceptualized as constructed within the celebrity apparatus, consisting of four strongly interdependent actors: famous person, entourage, media, and audiences. For this study, the famous-person/audience axis is crucial as celebrities need audiences to maintain their status. In turn, celebrities fulfil social roles for audiences (Authors, 2013a, 2013b; Dyer, 1998; Marshall, 2006; Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004). Much studied are celebrities' roles in providing entertainment, relaxation, a pleasant pastime, food for gossip, and guides in identity work (Authors, 2013a, 2013b; Dyer, 1998). However, this contribution focuses on celebrities as social companions with whom audience members can develop personal connections (PSI/PSR).

The term PSI describes the illusion of a face-to-face friendship between audience members and celebrities (Horton and Wohl, 1956; see Cohen, 2009; Giles, 2002, 2003). PSI is one-sided, as a large audience group knows a lot about a celebrity, who hardly knows anything about them, and almost exclusively takes place through media as people rarely encounter celebrities in real life (Giles, 2002).

Although there is a vast body of PSI/PSR studies, several shortcomings remain. First, most PSI/PSR research focuses on television personalities (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Eyal and Dailey, 2012; Eyal and Rubin, 2003; Lather and Moyer-Guse, 2011; Levy, 1979; Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Rubin and Perse, 1987; Schramm and Hartmann, 2008; Tian and Hoffner, 2010; Turner, 1993; Wang, Fink, and Cai, 2008). However, contemporary celebrity culture extends to a wide range of domains. Following others (Bocarnea and Brown, 2007; Cohen, 2010; McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran, 2002), this study acknowledges this variety and its relevance to better understanding of PSI/PSR.

Second, the PSI and PSR concepts are often used interchangeably, while they point to distinct processes (Klimmt et al., 2006; Schramm and Hartmann,

2008). PSI refers to short-term encounters in which audience members feel like they interact with celebrities, while PSR imply long-term connections developed over time and through various mediated encounters or PSI (Bocarnea and Brown, 2007; Giles, 2003; Hartmann et al., 2008; Klimmt et al., 2006). Indeed, audience members encounter celebrities in a range of performances, popular and quality media outlets, and social conversations. The conflation of these two concepts is problematic as several PSI and PSR scales include items tapping into both processes (Auter and Palmgreen, 2000; Rubin and Perse, 1987). In response, Schramm and Hartmann (2008) have developed the PSI-Process scales to clarify the distinctions between PSI and PSR. For PSR, several scales have been introduced (Bocarnea and Brown, 2007; Hartmann et al., 2008), but these are limited to one type of celebrity. Therefore, this study wishes to develop a new scale that focuses on long-term PSR and applies to a wide range of celebrities, building on existing PSI and PSR scales and on McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran's (2002) Celebrity Worship scale.

This study further investigates the nature of PSR by conducting confirmatory factor analysis to distinguish two main characteristic elements that recur in PSR literature. PSR functions such as relaxation or entertainment are not included as this study focuses on the nature of PSR rather than its effects. A first crucial element of PSR is emotional connection, encompassing empathy, intimacy, and comprehension (Boon and Lomore, 2001; Horton and Wohl, 1956; Klimmt et al., 2006; Rubin and Step, 2000). Second, PSR are repeatedly described as similar to social relationships (Cohen, 2010; Eyal and Dailey, 2012; Giles, 2003; Lather and Moyer-Guse, 2011; Rubin and Perse, 1987; Schramm and Hartmann, 2008; Turner, 1993; Wang et al., 2008) in terms of interpersonal expectations and processes of relationship development (Cole and Leets, 1999; Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Turner, 1993) and break-ups (Cohen, 2003), and knowledge gathering and storage (Schiappa et al., 2005). Indeed, celebrities are part of people's social world and are similar to friends or family members (Boon and Lomore, 2001).

[H1]   PSR consist of two main elements:
    1. emotional connection
    2. analogy with social relationships

Third, most PSR/PSI studies employ college student samples (e.g., Auter and Palmgreen, 2000; Cohen, 1997; Cohen, 2010; Eyal and Dailey, 2012; Eyal and Rubin, 2003; Lather and Moyer-Guse, 2011; Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Rubin and Perse, 1987; Schiappa et al., 2005; Turner, 1993; Wang et al., 2008). While scholars acknowledge this limitation, few studies actually obtain a more repre-

sentative sample (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Levy, 1979; McCutcheon et al., 2002; Rubin and Step, 2000; Schramm and Hartmann, 2008). The current academic PSI/PSR knowledge is thus situated within the college student population, a very specific, and in many ways a-typical societal group. This study addresses this by working with a large (*N* = 1000) representative sample of the Flemish adult population.

Finally, the relevance of socio-demographic variables – age, gender, education – has not been addressed properly. Indeed, most PSI/PSR research focuses on psychological or cognitive factors (cf. Maltby, McCutcheon, Ashe, and Houran, 2001; McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran, and Maltby, 2003) such as loneliness (cf. Ashe and McCutcheon, 2001), self-concept (cf. Adams-Price and Greene, 1990), narcissism (cf. Ashe, Maltby, and McCutcheon, 2005), aggression (cf. Dimmock and Grove, 2005), attachment styles (cf. Cole and Leets, 1999; Giles and Maltby, 2004), or need for entertainment (cf. Brock and Livingston, 2004). However, as is widely recognized in communication studies, socio-demographics play an additional and crucial role. This study therefore includes gender, age, and education rather than psychological traits because, to our knowledge, socio-demographic variables have hardly been addressed separately and never within one model.

With regard to celebrity preferences, Boon and Lomore (2001) and Cohen (1997, 2003) found that both men and women favor male celebrities. Celebrity preferences are further related to cultural proximity (Tian and Hoffner, 2010), here defined as "the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture" (Straubhaar, 2003, p. 85). This concept is relevant in a globalizing celebrity and media culture where audiences are faced with global and local celebrities (Ferris, 2010; Turner, 2004). De Backer, Nelissen, Vyncke, Braeckman, and McAndrew (2007) found that younger people prefer American celebrities, admiring their glamour, while older people connect to local celebrities. Further, Straubhaar (1991, 2003) found a preference for local media (television) content among lower-educated people while higher-educated prefer global (US) content.

[H2]   a. Male celebrities are selected more often as favorite celebrities by both men and women.
       b. Younger and more highly-educated people prefer global (American) celebrities, and older as well as more lowly -educated people prefer local celebrities.

Few PSI/PSR studies look explicitly at gender (i.e., not as a control variable), and the findings are contradictory. Cohen (1997, 2003) and Lather and Moyer-

Guse (2011) found that women have stronger PSR, whereas Eyal and Dailey (2012), Eyal and Rubin (2003), and McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran (2002) show that men have stronger PSR or celebrity involvement. Following Levin and Arluke (1985), the latter can be explained by the higher level of celebrity-related gossip among men than women.

[RQ1] How is gender related to PSR?

Age and education are included even less frequently in PSI/PSR research. Three exceptions are Cohen (2003), who did not find significant PSR differences between teens and adults, De Backer et al. (2007) and Levy (1979), who found a significant, positive relationship between age and PSI/PSR. Levy (1979) further found a negative relationship between education and PSI, which he links to higher levels of social interaction for the more highly-educated, which may limit their need for parasocial interactions. Except in Levy's study (1979), these socio-demographic variables have not been combined in one model, which is where this study wishes to contribute. This study further predicts that PSR are positively related to people's celebrity news interest, that is linked to their mediated celebrity encounters. Previously, television affinity (e.g., Auter and Palmgreen, 2000; Lather and Moyer-Guse, 2011) and TV news exposure (e.g., Levy 1979; Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Turner, 1993) were found to positively predict PSR with television personalities. For celebrity culture, this translates into celebrity news interest. Finally, strong associations between homophily and interpersonal liking confirms the relevance of cultural proximity for PSI/PSR (Klimmt et al., 2006; Rubin and Step, 2000; Tian and Hoffner, 2010; Turner, 1993). A celebrity's cultural proximity (operationalized as nationality) can thus be an interesting PSR predictor.

[H3] a. There is a positive relationship between age and PSR.
　　　b. There is a negative relationship between education and PSR.
　　　c. There is a positive relationship between celebrity news interest and PSR.
　　　d. PSR are stronger with local than global celebrities.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

Data were gathered in a large-scale representative online survey (N = 1000) in Flanders, administered by a Belgian research facilitator. The respondents were

501 men and 499 women. Age was measured in three groups: –30 (20.1 %), 30 to 49 (40.9 %), and 50+ (39.0 %). Education was also measured in three groups: lower secondary (i.e., had finished the third year of secondary school or less; 37.1 %), higher secondary (i.e., had finished all six years of secondary school; 35.8 %), and higher education (i.e., had finished college or university studies; 27.0 %). This sample is representative of the Flemish population for gender (FOD Economie, 2010a), age (with a 12.2 % overrepresentation of the 30–49 group, FOD Economie, 2010b), and education (FOD Economie, 2010c).

4 Procedure

The survey first asked respondents to name their favorite celebrity, with no restrictions for nationality, gender, or domain. This was followed by nineteen 5-point Likert-type statements (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) on PSR with respondents' favorite celebrity. Subsequently, respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age, education level, and interest in celebrity news (five 5-point Likert-type items; α = .86).

Table 1: Initial 19 items.

1	I feel like I know MFC well.
2	MFC could be my friend.
3	I think MFC is attractive.
4	I can empathize with the emotions of MFC.
5	I learn from the acts of MFC.
6	I often have the same point of view as MFC.
7	When something bad happens to MFC, I feel bad.
8	When something bad about MFC appears in the media, I feel hurt.
9	When my friends laugh at MFC, I feel hurt.
10	I like to talk about MFC with other people.
11	I talk about MFC like I talk about my friends.
12	I feel connected to MFC as I do to my friends.
13	MFC is like a family member to me.
14	I believe it is important to know everything about MFC.
15	Sometimes I actively search for information on MFC.
16	I would like to meet MFC.
17	I have tried to get in contact with MFC.
18	I don't want to meet MFC, because I believe the magic will disappear if I do.
19	Being able to follow MFC on Facebook or Twitter makes me feel close to him/her.

Note: MFC = My favorite celebrity.

To examine PSR, the survey combines the relevant items – focusing on the relational aspect – from existing scales with new items. From Auter and Palmgreen's Audience-Persona Interaction (API) scale (2000), Bocarnea and Brown's CPPI (Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction) scale (2007), Hartmann, Stuke, and Daschmann's Positive PSR scale (2008), McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran's (2002) Celebrity Worship scale, and Rubin and Perse's 10-item PSI scale (1987), those relational items were selected that compare the celebrity to a friend, investigate empathy, express the wish to read about and meet the celebrity, and comment on the latter's attractiveness. The remaining items were not selected as they examine other concepts (e.g., identification), short-term PSI, or one type of celebrity. Additional items were included in the analogy with social relationships (family, friendship [Adams and Blieszner, 1994]) and new social media (see Baym, 2011). This resulted in a nineteen-item scale that investigates long-term connections and is applicable to all celebrity types.

5 Analysis

All analyses were conducted in SPSS, and all respondents that indicated a favorite celebrity were included in the analyses (N = 893). To test H1, a new PSR scale was constructed by means of an inferential method in which the nineteen items described above were subjected to a confirmatory Principal Factor analysis. H2a was tested by means of the χ^2-values from a crosstab calculation and H2b in a logistic regression analysis. RQ1 and H3 (a, b, c, and d) were tested in preparatory t-tests, ANOVAs, Pearson's correlation matrix, and in a hierarchical regression analysis. In both the logistic and hierarchical regression analyses, interaction terms were included.

6 The nature of PSR

As stated above, a new PSR scale was developed by means of a confirmatory Principal Factor analysis using oblique Direct OBLIMIN rotation (cf. highly correlating factors; .69). Factor analysis was selected over a components analysis because component analyses are principally a-theoretical and aimed at data reduction instead of looking for underlying constructs (Van den Bosch, 2008). Since the literature repeatedly points to two main PSR components, confirmatory factor analysis is most appropriate here.

Table 2: The PSR scale.

Nr.	Item	Mean	SD	Emotional connection	Analogy to social relationships
1.	When something bad happens to MFC, I feel bad.	3.09	1.13	.793	−.031
2.	When something bad about MFC appears in the media, I feel hurt.	2.85	1.13	.723	.069
3.	When my friends laugh at MFC, I feel hurt.	2.74	1.17	.682	.049
4.	I learn from the acts of MFC.	3.06	1.06	.660	.016
5.	I often have the same point of view as MFC.	3.16	.93	.654	−.042
6.	I can empathize with the emotions of MFC.	3.37	1.05	.638	.021
7.	MFC is like a family member to me.	1.96	1.00	.007	.837
8.	I talk about MFC like I talk about my friends.	2.16	1.09	−.005	.824
9.	I feel connected to MFC as I do to my friends.	2.17	1.09	.084	.786
10.	Being able to follow MFC on Facebook or Twitter makes me feel close to him/her.	2.10	1.06	−.081	.727
11.	I have tried to get in contact with MFC.	1.77	1.07	−.053	.647
12.	I believe it is important to know everything about MFC.	2.52	1.17	.145	.641
13.	Sometimes I actively search for information on MFC.	2.75	1.28	.131	.505

Note: Principal factor analysis (Direct OBLIMIN); MFC: My favorite celebrity.

Initially, four factors were retained in the analysis, but after selecting the items loading higher than .50 on one factor and less than .50 on the others, two factors were retained. Thus, thirteen items remained, representing two factors defined as Emotional Connection (M = 3.04, SD = 0.82) and Analogy to Social Relationships (M = 2.21, SD = 0.86), together constituting the PSR scale (M = 2.59, SD = 0.76) (see Table 2). The variance explained by these factors was 52 % and the reliability resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .91 for the entire scale, .85 for the first factor (Emotional Connection; mean inter-item correlation = .49), and .89 for the second factor (Analogy; mean inter-item correlation = .54), which indicates high internal consistency and reliability. The first factor contained six items on empathy with, and comprehension of, the celebrity, confirming that emotional connection is an essential PSR aspect. The second factor consisted of seven items that explore comparisons between the celebrity and friends or family, reaffirming the importance of this analogy for PSR.

H1 was thus confirmed, and PSR can be defined as illusions of long-term friendships between audience members and celebrities, which are one-sided and created by the media, but encompass emotional connections and are similar to social relationships.

7 Who are the favorite celebrities?

Ninety percent of respondents indicated having a favorite celebrity, and 382 different celebrities were named. The top 10 contained five local Flemish celebrities (TV presenter Koen Wauters, singers Helmut Lotti and Will Tura, retired tennis player Kim Clijsters, and retired cyclist Eddy Merckx), four American (actors Johnny Depp, Angelina Jolie, and George Clooney and president Barack Obama), and one Irish (singer Bono). The sample of 382 celebrities consisted mainly of male celebrities (72 %) and celebrities from music (40 %), film (26 %), TV/radio (13 %), and sports (11 %). Boon and Lomore (2001) found a similar dominance of music and film celebrities. Most respondents favored local Flemish celebrities (44 %), followed by Americans (35 %). This implies that cultural proximity is important, but US celebrity culture is still dominant (cf. Authors, 2013c).

In terms of respondents' gender, there were no significant differences between male (71 %) and female (73 %) respondents ($\chi^2[1, N = 895] = 0.47, p > .05$) as both preferred male over female celebrities, supporting H2a (cf. Boon and Lomore, 2001; Cohen, 1997, 2003). Further, all respondents' age ($\chi^2[2, N = 895] = 0.31, p > .05$) and educational groups ($\chi^2[2, N = 895] = 2.51, p > .05$) preferred male over female celebrities. Although there was a marginally significant difference ($\chi^2[6, N = 894] = 13.31, p < .05$) between male and female respondents in terms of favorite celebrities' nationality, they both favored Flemish celebrities (men = 42 %, women = 46 %), followed by Americans (men = 36 %, women = 34 %).

The logistic regression analysis showed that cultural proximity was strongly and positively related to the 50+ ($Exp[B] = 2.041; p < .001$) and negatively related to higher secondary ($Exp[B] = .630; p < .05$) and higher educational groups ($Exp[B] = .522; p < .001$). However, the educational correlations became non-significant when including the interaction between age and education (see Table 3). When introducing this interaction term, the –30s had a significant negative relationship with cultural proximity, preferring global over local celebrities ($Exp[B] = .457; p < .05$). These findings partly supported H2b as well as De Backer et al.'s (2007) findings that older people attach more importance to

Table 3: Logistic regression for cultural proximity.

Cultural Proximity	Variable	B (SE)	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
1	−30	−.319 (.20)	2.683	1	.101	.727
	50+	.713 (.16)	19.438	1	.000	2.041
	Middle education	−.462 (.18)	7.653	1	.006	.630
	High education	−.649 (.19)	12.335	1	.000	.522
	Constant	−.127 (.16)	.647	1	.421	.881
2	−30	−.784 (.31)	6.314	1	.012	.457
	50+	1.150 (.278)	17.106	1	.000	3.158
	Middle education	.115 (.34)	.112	1	.738	1.121
	High education	.448 (.60)	.568	1	.451	1.565
	INT Age x Education	−.247 (.13)	3.748	1	.053	.782
	Constant	.293 (.27)	1.186	1	.276	1.341

Note: Step 1: p = .000; Nagelkerke R^2 = .093; Hosmer & Lemeshow Test: p = .578 (> .05 = good fit). Step 2: p = .000; Nagelkerke R^2 = .098; Hosmer & Lemeshow Test: p = .963 (> .05 = good fit).

cultural proximity, while younger people prefer global, American celebrities. The educational aspect of H2b was first confirmed here, but after introducing the age-education interaction, the effect disappeared.

8 Predictors of PSR

To examine the relations between the PSR scale and respondents' characteristics (gender, age, education, and celebrity news interest) and those of the celebrities (gender, domain, and nationality), preparatory t-tests (for gender), one-way ANOVA tests (for age, education, nationality, and domain), and a Pearson correlations matrix (for celebrity news interest) were computed. These preparatory tests gave a first impression of the variables' relation to PSR. The t-tests showed that respondents' gender significantly relates to the full PSR scale, $t(893)$ = 2.19, p = .029, and the Analogy factor, $t(893)$ = 2.55, p = .011, but not for Emotional Connection, $t(893)$ = 1.30, p = .196. Male respondents (M = 2.65, SD = 0.76, N = 454) maintained slightly stronger PSR than women (M = 2.54, SD = 0.75, N = 441) and men (M = 2.28, SD = 0.86) considered PSR to be slightly more analogous to social relationships than women (M = 2.13, SD = 0.85). Celebrities' gender was not significantly correlated to the PSR scale, $t(893)$ = 1.48, p = .138, or the factors (Emotional Connection $t(893)$ = 1.32, p = .187, and Analogy $t(893)$ = 1.36, p = .175) and was not included in subsequent analyses.

The one-way ANOVA tests demonstrated that respondents' age significantly related to the PSR scale, $F(2, 892) = 18,80$, $p < .001$, and the two factors (Emotional Connection, $F(2, 892) = 21.57$, $p < .001$, and Analogy, $F(2, 892) = 10.99$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc Scheffe tests showed that not all age groups differed significantly for PSR and the two factors: only the –30 and 50+. These two groups were dummified and included in the regression analyses, with the 30–49s as reference category. Respondents' educational level also related significantly to PSR, $F(2, 892) = 28.07$, $p < .001$, Emotional Connection, $F(2, 892) = 25.75$, $p < .001$, and Analogy, $F(2, 892) = 21.54$, $p < .001$. The educational levels were dummified and included in the analyses, with lower secondary education as reference category. With regard to celebrities' nationality (seven categories), the ANOVA showed a significant relation with PSR, $F(6, 888) = 8.82$, $p < .001$, and the two factors (Emotional Connection, $F(6, 888) = 10.74$, $p < .001$, and Analogy, $F(6, 888) = 5.23$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc Scheffe tests showed that only the American and Flemish nationalities differed significantly. Therefore, only local, Flemish nationality was dummified and included in the analyses, with global, American nationality as reference category. Finally, celebrity domain significantly related to PSR, $F(10, 884) = 6.45$, $p < .001$, Emotional Connection, $F(10, 884) = 9.74$, $p < .001$, and Analogy, $F(10, 884) = 3.86$, $p < .001$. In post-hoc Scheffe tests, only particular domains differed significantly: film, music, sports, politics, and religion. Only these domains were dummified and included in subsequent analyses with film as reference category. The Pearson correlation matrix showed that celebrity news interest related significantly to PSR, $r(891) = .54$, $p < .001$, Emotional Connection, $r(891) = .42$, $p < .001$, and Analogy, $r(891) = .54$, $p < .001$.

To examine the relative importance of these variables as predictors for PSR strength within one combined model, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed. In the first step, respondents' socio-demographic variables (gender, age, education) and their celebrity news interest were included as well as celebrities' nationality and domain. Interaction terms between the dummy categories of age, education, celebrity news interest, and cultural proximity (cf. celebrities' nationality) were introduced in a second step to control for any intervening or moderating effects.

9 PSR

Table 4 shows that 36.9 % of PSR strength was predicted by respondents' gender, age (50+), education (higher secondary, higher), celebrity news interest and celebrities' domain (politics, religion) and nationality (Flemish) in the first step ($p < .001$). The strongest predictors ($p < .001$) were respondents' higher education and celebrity news interest as well as celebrities' religious domain. Respondents with a higher education had weaker PSR ($\beta = -.143$) than more lowly-educated respondents, confirming H3b. Respondents with higher celebrity news interest had stronger PSR ($\beta = .505$), supporting H3c. Further, PSR with religious celebrities ($\beta = .107$) were stronger than with film celebrities. Respondents' gender negatively related to PSR, indicating that men had stronger PSR than women ($\beta = -.077$; $p < .05$). This confirms RQ1 and the findings of Eyal and Dailey (2012) and Eyal and Rubin (2003) but contrasts with those of Cohen (1997, 2003) and Lather and Moyer-Guse (2011). Respondents of 50+ had stronger PSR than those in the 30–49 age group ($\beta = .095$; $p < .05$), confirming H3a, and respondents with higher secondary education had weaker PSR than those with lower secondary education or less ($\beta = -.077$; $p < .05$), again confirming H3b. Further, PSR were stronger for politicians ($\beta = .064$; $p < .05$) and local Flemish celebrities ($\beta = .077$; $p < .05$). The latter finding confirmed H3d as cultural proximity positively predicted PSR strength.

The introduction of interaction terms in the second step did not result in a significant R^2 change ($p > .05$), but some interesting changes appeared. Indeed, the 50+ age level was no longer a significant PSR predictor ($\beta = .026$; $p > .05$) but the −30 age level became a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.136$; $p < .05$) indicating that −30s had weaker PSR than older respondents. Further, cultural proximity (i.e., Flemish nationality) lost significance and turned negative ($\beta = -.007$; $p > .05$), and celebrities' music ($\beta = .063$; $p < .05$) and sports domains ($\beta = .063$; $p < .05$) gained significance. Two interaction terms had a significant effect, indicating that higher secondary education played a larger role for −30s in determining PSR strength ($\beta = .113$; $p < .05$), and celebrity news interest played a smaller role for −30's PSR ($\beta = -.093$; $p < .05$). Respondents' gender, education (higher secondary, higher), celebrity news interest, and celebrities' domains of politics and religion remained significant predictors.

To better understand the relative importance of these characteristics for the main PSR elements, a hierarchical regression analysis for the two factors was conducted.

Table 4: Hierarchical regression analysis for PSR.

PSR	B (SE)	β	R^2	R^2 change	F
1 Gender (R)	−.117 (.04)	−.077*	.369	.369**	$F(11,882) =$ 46.94**
Age (R):					
− −30	−.071 (.06)	−.038			
− **−50+**	.149 (.05)	.095*			
Education (R):					
− **Higher secondary**	−.121 (.05)	−.077*			
− **Higher**	−.245 (.06)	−.143**			
Celebrity news interest (R)	.387 (.02)	.505**			
Domain (C):					
− Music	.086 (.05)	.056			
− Sports	.140 (.07)	.057			
− **Politics**	.215 (.10)	.064*			
− **Religion**	.810 (.21)	.107**			
Nationality (C):					
− **Flemish (local)**	.118 (.04)	.077*			
2 **Gender (R)**	−.109 (.04)	−.072*	.385	.016 (ns)	$F(24,869) =$ 22.65**
Age (R):					
− **−30**	−.255 (.12)	−.136*			
− 50+	.040 (.10)	.026			
Education (R):					
− **Higher secondary**	−.210 (.093)	−.133*			
− **Higher**	−.332 (.10)	−.194*			
Celebrity news interest (R)	.420 (.05)	.548**			
Domain (C):					
− **Music**	.098 (.05)	.063*			
− **Sports**	.155 (.07)	.063*			
− **Politics**	.240 (.10)	.071*			
− **Religion**	.789 (.21)	.104**			
Nationality (C):	−.011 (.10)	−.007			
− Flemish (local)					
Interaction terms					
−30; higher secondary	.287 (.14)	.113*			
−30; higher education	.035 (.15)	.010			
50+; higher secondary	.082 (.12)	.033			
50+; higher education	.043 (.13)	.014			
−30; Flemish	.177 (.12)	.057			
50+; Flemish	.145 (.10)	.080			
higher sec.; Flemish	−.040 (.10)	−.018			
higher educ.; Flemish	.164 (.12)	.063			
−30: Celeb news	−.144 (.06)	−.093*			
50+; Celeb news	−.036 (.05)	−.029			
higher sec.; Celeb news	.020 (.05)	.015			
high educ.; Celeb news	−.043 (.06)	−.027			
Flemish; Celeb news	.046 (.04)	.043			

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .001$ [R = Respondent; C = Celebrity], $N = 893$.

10 Emotional Connection

The R^2 value for emotional connection in the first step (without interaction terms) was 27.6 % ($p < .001$) (Table 5). Respondents' higher education ($\beta = -.139$; $p < .001$) and celebrity news interest ($\beta = .382$; $p < .001$) were strongly significant predictors, indicating that more lowly-educated people with a high celebrity news interest had stronger emotional connections. Further, emotional connections were stronger for politicians ($\beta = .121$; $p < .001$) and religious celebrities ($\beta = .120$; $p < .001$). The 50+ respondents had stronger emotional connections than the 30–49s ($\beta = .093$; $p < .05$), and those with higher secondary education had weaker emotional connections than the less-educated respondents ($\beta = -.110$; $p < .05$). Further, connections were stronger for sports ($\beta = .076$; $p < .05$) than film celebrities and for local Flemish than global (US) celebrities ($\beta = .104$; $p < .05$).

The second step, introducing the interaction terms, did not provide a significant R^2 change ($p > .05$) but several interesting shifts appeared. 50+ and cultural proximity lost significance ($p > .05$) while respondents' educational level and celebrity news interest remained significant as well as the celebrity domains of sports, politics, and religion. Two interaction terms had significant values indicating that cultural proximity was more important for the most highly-educated respondents' emotional connections ($\beta = .102$; $p < .05$), and celebrity news interest was less important for −30s ($\beta = -.081$; $p < .05$).

11 Analogy to social relationships

The first step of Table 6 explained 34.9 % of the variance of the analogy to social relationships ($p < .001$). The strongest predictors were respondents' higher education ($\beta = -.121$; $p < .001$) and celebrity news interest ($\beta = .518$; $p < .001$), followed by gender ($\beta = -.094$; $p < .05$) and the 50+ group ($\beta = .081$; $p < .05$), indicating that the analogy to social relationships was higher for 50+, less-educated men highly interested in celebrity news. Further, celebrities' music ($\beta = .081$; $p < .05$) and religious domains ($\beta = .077$; $p < .05$) were significant predictors, implying that the analogy to social relationships was stronger for music and religious than film celebrities.

The second step introduced the interaction terms and was a significant R^2 contribution ($p < .05$). Here, the 50+ lost its significance ($\beta = .014$; $p > .05$) while the −30s gained significance ($\beta = -.395$; $p < .05$) indicating that they compared PSR less to social relationships. Further, respondents' gender re-

Table 5: Hierarchical regression analysis for Emotional Connection.

Emotional Connection	B (SE)	β	R^2	R^2 change	F
1 Gender (R)	−.065 (.05)	−.039	.267	.276**	$F(11,882) =$ 30.51**
Age (R):					
− −30	−.073 (.06)	−.036			
− **50+**	.158 (.06)	.093*			
Education (R):					
− **Higher secondary**	−.187 (.06)	−.110*			
− **Higher**	−.257 (.06)	−.139**			
Celebrity news interest (R)	.316 (.02)	.382**			
Domain (C):					
− Music	.021 (.05)	.013			
− **Sports**	.202 (.09)	.076*			
− **Politics**	.440 (.11)	.121**			
− **Religion**	.988 (.24)	.120**			
Nationality (C):					
− **Flemish (local)**	.171 (.05)	.104*			
2 Gender (R)	−.054 (.05)	−.033	.293	.017 (ns)	$F(24,869) =$ 15.00**
Age (R):					
− **−30**	−.092 (.14)	−.046			
− 50+	.059 (.11)	.035			
Education (R):					
− **Higher secondary**	−.317 (.11)	−.186*			
− **Higher**	−.348 (.11)	−.188*			
Celebrity news interest (R)	.319 (.06)	.386**			
Domain (C):					
− **Music**	.044 (.05)	.026			
− **Sports**	.217 (.09)	.082*			
− **Politics**	.434 (.11)	.119**			
− **Religion**	.928 (.24)	.113**			
Nationality (C):					
− Flemish (local)	−.032 (.11)	−.202			
Interaction terms:					
−30; higher secondary	.091 (.16)	.033			
−30; higher education	−.264 (.18)	−.070			
50+; higher secondary	.102 (.13)	.038			
50+; higher education	.039 (.15)	.012			
−30; Flemish	.187 (.14)	.056			
50+; Flemish	.142 (.12)	.072			
higher sec.; Flemish	.099 (.12)	.042			
higher educ.; Flemish	.287 (.13)	.102*			
−30; Celeb news	−.135 (.06)	−.081*			
50+; Celeb news	.042 (.06)	.031			
higher sec.; Celeb news	.069 (.06)	.049			
high educ.; Celeb news	.046 (.07)	.027			
Flemish; Celeb news	−.037 (.05)	−.032			

Note: *p < .05, **p < .001 [R = Respondent; C = Celebrity], N = 893.

Table 6: Hierarchical regression analysis for Analogy to Social Relationships.

Analogy to Social Relationships	B (SE)	β	R^2	R^2 change	F
1 **Gender (R)**	−.162 (.05)	−.094*	.349	.349**	$F(11,882) =$ 42.96**
Age (R):					
− −30	−.069 (.06)	−.033			
− **50+**	.142 (.06)	.081*			
Education (R):					
− **Higher secondary**	−.065 (.06)	−.037			
− **Higher**	−.235 (.06)	−.121**			
Celebrity news interest (R)	.447 (.02)	.518**			
Domain (C):					
− Music	.142 (.05)	.081			
− Sports	.087 (.08)	.031			
− Politics	.022 (.11)	.006			
− **Religion**	.657 (.24)	.077*			
Nationality (C):					
− Flemish (local)	.072 (.05)	.042			
2 **Gender (R)**	−.157 (.05)	−.091*	.373	.024*	$F(24,869) =$ 21.53**
Age (R):					
− **−30**	−.395 (.13)	−.187*			
− 50+	.025 (.11)	.014			
Education (R):					
− Higher secondary	−.119 (.11)	−.067			
− **Higher**	−.319 (.11)	−.165*			
Celebrity news interest (R)	.506 (.06)	.585**			
Domain (C):					
− **Music**	.145 (.05)	.083*			
− Sports	.103 (.08)	.037			
− Politics	.074 (.11)	.019			
− **Religion**	.669 (.24)	.078*			
Nationality (C):					
− Flemish (local)	.008 (.11)	.005			
Interaction terms:					
−30; higher secondary	.455 (.16)	.159*			
−30; higher education	.292 (.17)	.074			
50+; higher secondary	.065 (.13)	.023			
50+; higher education	.045 (.15)	.013			
−30; Flemish	.169 (.14)	.048			
50+; Flemish	.148 (.11)	.072			
higher sec.; Flemish	−.159 (.12)	−.065			
higher educ.; Flemish	.059 (.13)	.020			
−30: Celeb news	−.152 (.06)	−.087*			
50+; Celeb news	−.103 (.06)	−.073			
higher sec.; Celeb news	−.023 (.06)	−.015			
high educ.; Celeb news	−.118 (.06)	−.068			
Flemish; Celeb news	.118 (.05)	.097*			

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .001$ [R = Respondent; C = Celebrity], $N = 893$.

mained a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.091$; $p < .05$) as well as the highest educational level ($\beta = -.165$; $p < .05$) and celebrity news interest ($\beta = .585$; $p < .001$). Celebrities' music ($\beta = .083$; $p < .05$) and religious ($\beta = .078$; $p < .05$) domains also maintained significance. Three interaction terms significantly related to the analogy to social relationships, indicating that higher secondary education played a larger role for −30s ($\beta = .159$; $p < .05$), and celebrity news interest played a smaller role for −30s ($\beta = -.087$; $p < .05$) and a larger role when the favorite celebrity was Flemish ($\beta = .097$; $p < .05$).

12 Discussion

This article wanted to help fill shortcomings in PSR research: its focus on television celebrities, confusion between PSI and PSR, the use of student samples, and the lack of consideration of socio-demographic variables as predictors of PSR. The current study therefore comprised a wide range of celebrities, both in respondents' favorite celebrities and the PSR scale. The newly developed scale explicitly focused on long-term PSR (rather than short-term PSI) by combining relational items from previous scales with new items (comparison to friendships/family and new media). The respondent sample provided insight into celebrity preferences and PSR in a broad adult population (representative of Flanders) rather than college students. Finally, the relevance of respondents' gender, age, and education for celebrity preferences and PSR strength was analyzed in one combined model which also included respondents' celebrity news interest and celebrities' gender, domain, and nationality (and relevant interaction terms).

In a factor analysis, the two main elements of PSR suggested in the literature were confirmed by the data: emotional connection and analogy to social relationships (H1). This empirically validated the definition of PSR as illusions of long-term friendships between audience members and celebrities, which are one-sided and created by the media, but encompass an emotional connection and are similar to social relationships.

With regard to respondents' celebrity preferences, H2a was supported as male celebrities were preferred by both men and women. Further, cultural proximity was more important for older than younger respondents, partly supporting H2b and confirming previously found gender and age preferences (Boon and Lomore, 2001; De Backer et al., 2007) and preference for local celebrities among older people and for global (US) celebrities among younger people (De Backer et al., 2007). The older respondents' preference for local and the young-

er respondents' for global celebrities can be linked to globalization processes, bridging local audiences with international celebrities while previously audiences were more restricted to local celebrities (Turner, 2004). The other element of H2b was not supported as the age-education interaction reduced the significance of education for cultural proximity, refuting Straubhaar's (1991) findings in that regard.

The strength of PSR and its factors was predicted most strongly by respondents' celebrity news interest – confirming H3c – and education – confirming H3b – especially for the most highly-educated group. The former confirmed the comparability of television affinity (Lather and Moyer-Guse, 2011) and celebrity news interest. The latter is interesting because the highly significant differences were between the most highly-educated and most lowly-educated respondents, qualifying Levy's (1979) findings that PSR increase as education decreases. Indeed, the lower versus higher-secondary difference was less strong and significant. Education remains underexplored in PSR and celebrity research, and should be considered in future studies.

Men maintained stronger PSR and considered them to be more like social relationships than women (RQ1), confirming Eyal and Dailey's (2012), Eyal and Rubin's (2003) and McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran's (2002) findings but contrasting those of Cohen (1997, 2003) and Lather and Moyer-Guse (2011). This is an important and somewhat surprising outcome that requires further explanation considering that celebrities usually attract a more female following (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 16). However, men may be less able to maintain their networks and turn to PSR to fulfil social needs, as they consider them more similar to social relationships. Additionally, men were found to gossip more about celebrities than women (Levin and Arluke, 1985).

Age was a significant PSR predictor but only for the distinction between the 50+ and 30–49 groups without interaction terms. When interactions were considered, the difference between the –30s and 30–49s became significant. This qualifies previous findings (De Backer et al., 2007; Levy, 1979), namely that PSR are significantly stronger for 50+ (not considering interactions) and weaker for –30s (when including interaction terms), confirming H3a. More research is needed into the interplay between PSR and age and the special role of celebrities for older adults.

PSR were thus stronger among older, less-educated men who were highly interested in celebrity news. Further, both celebrities' domain and nationality were significant PSR predictors. Stronger PSR were found with religious celebrities and politicians, and emotional connections were stronger with religious celebrities, politicians, musicians, and sports celebrities as compared to film celebrities. This confirms McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran's (2002) findings for

music and sports celebrities and can be linked to the central role of emotion in music, religion, politics, and sports (Marshall, 1997; Rojek, 2001; Van Zoonen, 2005). Finally, celebrities' nationality or cultural proximity was a significant predictor (when not considering the interaction terms), confirming H3d, with stronger PSR for local Flemish than global American celebrities. Only the emotional connection factor was significantly and positively related to cultural proximity (when excluding the interaction terms). Once again, this qualifies previous cultural proximity and interpersonal liking research (e.g., Tian and Hoffner, 2010). Finally, interesting interactions were found indicating that celebrity news interest played a smaller role for the –30s' PSR and that higher education was more important for the –30s.

This study had several limitations as, first, the sample did not include –18 respondents, while previous research showed teenagers have strong PSR (De Backer et al., 2007). Second, the PSR scale only measured positive PSR, whereas Hartmann et al. (2008) and Tian and Hoffner (2010) point to the relevance of negative PSR. Third, new applications of the PSR scale are necessary to test its reliability in other contexts. Fourth, the respondents could indicate only one favorite celebrity, whereas they potentially maintain PSR with multiple celebrities. Finally, qualitative research is needed to analyze the specific processes involved in the development and maintenance of PSR. Despite these shortcomings, this study demonstrated the relevance of PSR with celebrities in audiences' everyday lives. It revealed that audiences' gender, age, education, cultural proximity, and celebrity news interest as well as celebrities' domains and nationalities were relevant factors for PSR, which should be systematically included in future research in order to gain better insight into the workings of celebrity culture from an audience perspective.

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