

Television Drama Viewing and Romantic Beliefs: Considering Parasocial Interaction and Attachment Style

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships between attachment styles, drama viewing, parasocial interaction, and romantic beliefs. A survey of students revealed that drama viewing was weakly but negatively related to romantic beliefs, controlling for parasocial interaction and attachment styles. Instead, parasocial interaction mediated the effect of drama viewing on romantic beliefs: Those who viewed television dramas more heavily reported higher levels of parasocial interaction, which lead to stronger romantic beliefs. Regarding the attachment styles, anxiety was positively related to drama viewing and parasocial interaction, while avoidance was negatively related to parasocial interaction and romantic beliefs. These findings indicate that attachment styles and parasocial interaction are important for the association of drama viewing and romantic beliefs.

Keywords: Television drama, parasocial interaction, romantic beliefs, attachment styles, cultivation

1. Introduction

People have norms about how personal and social relationships should unfold. They have expectations about what their close friendships should be like and what they should do or shouldn't do in romantic relationships. These relational norms and beliefs are developed through direct and indirect experiences. Consider the fairy tales we heard in our childhood, and the novels, movies, and television shows we consume. In many cases, close relationships—romantic love in particular—are the central theme of those stories. Thus, people's beliefs and concepts of romantic relationships can be affected by the stories portrayed in mass media including books, films, and television programs (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Segrin & Nabi, 2002).

Romantic stories and episodes are prevalent in mass media, which may shape young viewers' stereotypical images of romantic relationships even before they ever experience real romantic relationships. In this regard, Bachen and Illouz (1996) showed that children's imagined first-date activities and ideal love stories were congruent with those portrayed in mass media such as television shows and advertisements. They claim that romantically idealized culture pervasive in mass media permeates individuals' daily practices of romantic relationships. Also, children's conceptions about love involved good communication, which consisted of heart-to-heart conversation, sharing, and mutual understanding (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). In fact, good communication is an important part of idealized romantic beliefs. People think of ideal romantic love as a flawless union of two persons with perfect chemistry that nothing can interrupt (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). These beliefs or expectations are associated with how we form and maintain relationships by influencing whom we choose as our partner and how we manage conflicts in relationships (Knee, 1998; Sprecher & Mettz, 1999).

Communication and media studies, including cultivation analyses, have examined the effects of mass media. Considering the critical importance of intimate relationships in one's happiness and well-being, relatively few studies have focused on mass media's roles in individuals' perceptions about intimate relationships (for an exception, see Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Thus, the present study focuses on the effects of television viewing on perceptions about romantic relationships. Specifically, we assess the amount of drama viewing and its relation to idealized romantic beliefs. We also examine how viewers' attachment styles and parasocial interaction are related to drama viewing and romantic beliefs. Although we all share the mass mediated symbolic world, its influences are not uniform. They would vary by differences in personal characteristics and by the way that the symbols are interpreted. Thus, this study considers attachment styles and parasocial interaction as important factors influencing the cultivation effects of drama viewing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Television Influence: Cultivation

Cultivation studies have demonstrated that television socializes viewers by providing information about how the world looks like. This process is very powerful because television constantly produces "a coherent set of images and messages" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002, p. 44). Gerbner and colleagues (2002) emphasize the massive and cumulative effect of television as a primary storyteller. Targeting large heterogeneous audiences, television stories—regardless of specific genres or programs—tend to have common features in their structures and appeal strategies. Also, people tend to view television in habitual and ritualistic ways, which make them more vulnerable to its influence (Gerbner et al., 2002). Cultivation studies generally show that heavy viewers' perceptions of social reality are more similar than those of light viewers to the reality television presents (Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman, 1994). This is well known by the *mean world syndrome* that heavy viewers are more likely than light viewers to report higher estimates of the prevalence of crime and violence and to think that other people are mean and unreliable (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980).

Although Gerbner emphasized television viewing itself (Gerbner et al., 2002), many other scholars took specific genre or programs into consideration (e.g., Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; Potter & Chang, 1990). Hawkins and Pingree (1981) showed that viewing crime-adventure, cartoon, and game programs was significantly related to the reality beliefs of violence, while viewing other types of programs was not. Thus, they contended that cultivation was a concrete effect resulted from the interaction between viewers' actions and specific television content. In recent, a longitudinal study demonstrates that local television news cultivated fatalistic beliefs about cancer prevention, whereas national news did not (Lee & Niederdeppe, 2011). Overall television viewing, however, still had a significant influence on the fatalistic beliefs, which indicates while the cultivation effect of overall television viewing is valid, specific programs can additionally contribute to it (Lee & Niederdeppe, 2011).

Overall television viewing is also associated with perceptions about personal relationships. Signorielli (1991) found that television viewing was related to attitudes and beliefs about marriage and family. According to her content analyses and literature review of television programs, some (e.g., prime time shows) tend to present happy traditional family relationships, while some others (e.g., day time serials) unhappy or broken families. Consequently, adolescents showed ambivalent attitudes toward marriage and intimate relationships. That is, television viewing was positively related to the tendency to report wanting to get married and having children but being not sure if marriage is a good way of life. Signorielli claimed that these contradictory views were consistent with television's portrayals of marriage. In a similar vein, focusing on some changes in television's imaginary of family relationships, Morgan, Leggett, and Shanahan (1999) showed that television viewing was negatively related to traditional family values. Program specific effects were also found in regard to the perception of intimate relationships. Segrin and Nabi (2002) reported that romantic genre viewing was more strongly related to idealistic expectations about marriage than overall viewing was. Focusing on sexual relationships portrayed in television dramas, soap-operas, and music videos, Ward (2002) found that adolescents' viewing of those programs was positively associated with traditional gender roles attitudes and stereotypical sexual attitudes.

In Korea where the current study was conducted, television dramas are more homogeneous in their narrative forms, and romantic drama is the most popular one, as compared to American dramas (Jiang & Leung, 2012; Lin & Tong, 2008; Park, 2014). Also, they tend to depict romantic relationships in idealized ways such that true love lasts forever.

Jiang and Leung (2012) pointed out “‘pure love’ and characters’ relationships” as a marked characteristic of Korean dramas (p. 165). In Yang’s (2008) study, Korean dramas were mentioned as “love dramas,” and an interviewee said that “love portrayed in Korean drama is bloody melodramatic” (p. 72).

Although these studies focus on the dramas imported to China and Taiwan, most Korean drama stories are in actuality about close relationships. A content analysis of value orientations in Korean dramas revealed that 606 drama characters showed the highest priorities for love and family (Yang, 2010). Of course, Korean dramas have components conflicting with pure romantic love, such as betrayals and vengeance, but even these dramas tend to end up with the love between the main characters lasting always (see Cho, Hong, Kang, & Moon, 2007). These characteristics such as ‘pure love’ and ‘true love lasts’ are central components of “the ideology of romanticism” (Sprecher & Metts, 1989, p. 387). Based on previous writings, Sprecher and Metts (1989) described the romanticism as “the primacy of love as a basis for mate selection (over considerations of class, status or custom), love at first sight, only one true love, true love forever, and intrepid lovers can overcome obstacles that stand in their way” (p. 387). They developed the scale assessing this romanticism and termed it romantic beliefs scale. Romantic beliefs shape one’s perceptions and behaviors within romantic relationships, working as a schematic orientation toward love (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). As mentioned earlier, romanticism is a common theme in these days’ popular media including television dramas. Therefore, we posit a positive relationship between drama viewing and romantic beliefs (H1).

2.2 Mediator: Parasocial Interaction

Cultivation theory maintains that people who watch television stories repeatedly take the real world as similar to the stories. Then, those who are more intensely absorbed in television stories would be more subject to their influences. Television stories give us an illusion of having a face-to-face interaction with the characters in the stories. Horton and Wohl (1956) termed this phenomenon *parasocial interaction*. Viewers develop one-sided relationships with media characters in the same way they do with other people in person. Thus, the principles applied in forming interpersonal relationships are also applied in forming parasocial relationships. For instance, people were more attracted to media characters that were more similar to themselves (Perse & Rubin, 1989). These findings partly explain why being immersed in stories can blur the distinction between real world and narrative world. Because the same mechanisms are applied in face-to-face and parasocial interactions, both equally construct people’s reality (see Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Perse & Rubin, 1989).

Since parasocial interaction was set as a mediator in the current study, it should be related to both drama viewing and romantic beliefs. Specifically, those who watch television dramas more should be involved in higher levels of parasocial interaction, which should lead to stronger romantic beliefs. As for the first link between drama viewing and parasocial interaction, studies showed that parasocial interaction is positively related to the preferences for certain programs and the amount of viewing them (Greenwood, 2008; Perse & Rubin, 1989). Previous studies have examined parasocial interaction with various media persons such as news casters (Houlberg, 1984; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), celebrities (Hoffner, 1996; Rubin & McHugh, 1987), and soap-opera characters (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & Perse, 1987). These studies suggest that parasocial interaction is positively associated with various viewing features such as viewing intention and motivation, attention and affinity to programs, and perceived reality of program content. As for the second link from parasocial interaction and romantic beliefs, there is little research assessing the direct relationship between them. However, we can infer a significant association between parasocial interaction and romantic beliefs based on relevant evidence. Studies showed that the absorbedness in or perceived realism of media stories makes audiences believe that the stories are true to the reality. That is, cultivation effects were stronger for those who were more engaged in media content (Green & Brock, 2000) and those who perceived the content as more realistic (Busselle, 2001; Morgan, Movius, & Cody, 2009; Potter, 1986).

These findings indicate that parasocial interaction, the degree to which viewers feel that they are really interacting with media persons, can yield similar consequences. That is, those who are more actively engaged in parasocial interaction may show stronger romantic beliefs. Thus, the present study expects that the degree of parasocial interaction would mediate the relationship between drama viewing and idealized romantic beliefs (H2). That is, drama viewing would be positively related to the degrees of parasocial interactions (H3), and that the degrees of parasocial interactions would be positively related to idealize romantic beliefs (H4).

2.3 Antecedent: Attachment Style

This study also considers individual differences in the process of television influences. Although numerous studies show cultivation effects vary by demographic variables including ethnicity, income, and sex (e.g., Cohen & Wiemann, 1999; Potter, 1986), fewer studies have examined how personality is associated with cultivation effects (see Nabi & Riddle, 2008). Nabi and Riddle (2008) emphasized the importance of personality in cultivation effects in that internal preferences would interact with the selection, process, and outcomes of external stimuli. They found that some personality traits were associated with cultivation effects. For instance, the cultivation effects of estimating the personal victimization of violence were stronger, unlike their expectations, for those with lower trait anxiety than those with higher trait anxiety. In addition, psychoticism and sensation-seeking were related to the self-reported enjoyment of violent programs (Nabi & Riddle, 2008). These findings indicate that personal characteristics would be related to the degree of exposure to television drama and its effects. As such, we argue that drama viewing and parasocial interaction should be associated with certain individual characteristics such as attachment styles.

Although Nabi and Riddle (2008) examined moderation effects between personality and television viewing, we regarded attachment styles as a simple antecedent for drama viewing, parasocial interaction, and romantic beliefs. Attachment styles are important in understanding how people communicate and develop close relationships with other people (Daly, 2011). Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualized romantic love as an attachment process in which individuals form romantic relationships in similar ways that they formed close relationships with their primary caregivers. Although Hazan and Shaver proposed three categories of attachment styles (i.e., secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent), many studies viewed that attachment styles vary across two dimensions: avoidance and anxiety (e.g., Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994). Avoidance refers to the tendency to keep away from close relationships due to discomfort with intimate feelings, and anxiety refers to the strong desire for closeness with fear of abandonment (Brennan et al., 1998). Studies have found one's attachment style is an important factor for understanding his or her perceptions and experiences of romantic relationships (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer, 1998). For instance, avoidant individuals tend to view love negatively and have doubts about the existence of romantic love, while anxious individuals tend to fall in love more instantly and maintain it more obsessively (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Regarding romantic beliefs, anxious people are more likely to endorse the idealization of romantic love than non-anxious or avoidant people (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hart, Hung, Glick, & Dinero, 2012). Considering the characteristics of attachment anxiety (e.g., seeking a true love) and avoidance (e.g., distrust), it is understandable that anxious individuals would have idealized beliefs about romantic relationships, but avoidant individuals would not. Previous studies also showed that attachment styles were related to parasocial interaction. Cole and Leets (1999) found that those with anxious styles were more intensely involved in parasocial interactions than those with avoidant styles. A few other studies consistently found the positive relationship between attachment anxiety and parasocial interaction (Cohen, 2004; Greenwood & Long, 2011). Furthermore, for those with anxious styles, parasocial relationships seemed to compensate for ongoing relational experiences (Greenwood & Long, 2011). That is, those who are not satisfied with romantic relationships, partly due to their obsessive characteristics, may find parasocial relationships secure and thus satisfying. These findings indicate that anxious individuals would enjoy more drama viewing and have more idealized beliefs about romantic relationships as well. However, avoidant individuals would neither like viewing television dramas nor have idealized fantasy in romantic relationships.

We therefore hypothesize that attachment styles are associated with drama viewing, parasocial interaction, and romantic beliefs. Specifically, attachment anxiety would be positively related to drama viewing (H5a), parasocial interactions (H5b), and thereby idealized romantic beliefs (H5c). Attachment avoidance would be negatively related to drama viewing (H6a), parasocial interactions (H6b), and idealized romantic beliefs (H6c). The overall relationships between these variables are depicted in Figure 1. The goal of the current study is to test this hypothesized model.

3. Method

3.1 Procedure and Participants

We collected data through a paper-and-pencil survey. Students in introductory communication classes in a university in Seoul participated in the survey.

Four hundred and ninety-eight students participated, but 49 were excluded due to incomplete responses, resulting in the sample size of 449. Participants were all Koreans, and 258 (57.7%) were female. The mean age was 20.2 ($SD = 1.6$), ranging from 18 to 29. All participants were unmarried. We view that focusing on a certain age group is appropriate in studying the relationship between drama viewing and romantic beliefs, because television viewing habits and relational expectations would vary depending on the life stage. Particularly, young unmarried people such as college students may have relatively malleable attitudes or beliefs about romantic relationships, as compared to older married people; and they may be more susceptible to media influence. In addition, since the main characters of Korean dramas are more likely young unmarried couples (see Park, 2014), it would be easier for the young to identify themselves with the main characters.

3.2 Measures

Television drama viewing. Since this study was conducted in South Korea, the items for assessing drama viewing specifically asked the viewing behaviors of Korean dramas only. Participants reported the time they spend viewing Korean television dramas in an average weekday and in an average weekend day, respectively. Responses to these questions were weighted and summed to yield a score of average weekly viewing time ($M = 161$ minutes, $SD = 283$, $Mdn = 60$). In addition to viewing time, the degree of drama viewing was also measured with three scaled items (adopted from Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2011): “I rarely watch television drama,” “I do watch television drama almost every day,” and “I try to watch television drama whenever I have free time.” The response format was a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). These three items showed a good reliability ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.13$) and a relatively strong correlation with the time of drama viewing ($r = .78$).

Parasocial interaction. In order to assess parasocial interaction, a modified version of the Rubin et al.’s (1985) Parasocial Interaction Scale was used. We previously conducted a pilot study ($N = 228$) to translate the Parasocial Interaction Scale and the Romantic Beliefs Scale and to see the reliability and validity of them. Based on the results of this pilot study, we selected six items such as “I feel sorry for my favorite character when he or she is in trouble,” and “When I’m watching the television drama, I feel as if I am part of the story.” Participants were instructed to report their general tendency to watch television dramas. A 5-point Likert-type response format (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) was provided, and this scale yielded an alpha of .83 ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.83$).

Idealized romantic beliefs. Idealized romantic beliefs were measured with Sprecher and Metts’ (1989) Romantic Beliefs Scale. We used a short version of the scale, based on the results of the pilot study, which included six items such as “If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work, despite any obstacles” and “The relationship I have with my ‘true love’ will be nearly perfect.” Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), and the reliability of the six items was acceptable ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.80$).

Attachment styles. The Multi-Item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment Scale (Brennan et al., 1998) was used to measure attachment styles. This scale included two 18-item subscales: anxiety (e.g., “I worry a lot about my relationships.”) and avoidance (e.g., “I prefer not to be close to romantic partners.”). Participants rated agreement with 36 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The two subscales were computed so that the higher the score, the greater the anxiety or the avoidance. Coefficient alphas were .89 for the avoidance scale ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.84$) and .91 for the anxiety scale ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.98$).

4. Results

We tested our hypothesized model with structural equation modeling (SEM), using AMOS 18 with maximum likelihood estimation. Figure 1 presents the model used in the SEM analyses. As for the latent variable of drama viewing, the three five-point scale items were used as indicators. As Shrum et al. (2011) claimed, multi-item measures are better than single-item measures, and the composite score of multiple items is more reliable than the estimate of viewing time. For the other latent variables, corresponding scale items were parceled into three indicators. For example, the six parasocial interaction items were randomly divided into three groups (two items per group) and the mean of the two items in each group was used as an indicator (i.e., parcel). Little, Cunningham, Shahar, and Widaman (2002) recommend item parceling when the relations among the latent variables rather than the individual items are of interest. Since we are interested in the relationships between variables, a random assignment technique was employed to create the three parcels for each latent construct.

Preliminary analyses revealed that sex and age were significantly related to some variables of interest. For instance, females viewed television drama and had parasocial interaction more than males. Age was negatively related to parasocial interaction ($r = -.12, p = .014$) and attachment anxiety ($r = -.14, p = .003$). However, controlling sex and age did not significantly influence the results of this study reported below, and differences by sex and age were not of interest to this study, thus the following analyses did not include any covariates.

The hypothesized model presented in Figure 1 fitted well: $\chi^2 = 155.75, df = 80, p < .001, CFI = .978, TLI = .971, RMSEA = .046$ (90% confidence interval, $.035 \sim .057$). We expected that drama viewing would be positively related to romantic beliefs. Contrary to this expectation (H1), controlling for attachment styles and parasocial interaction yielded a significant negative association between drama viewing and romantic beliefs ($\beta = -.13, p = .027$). Drama viewing, however, was positively related to parasocial interaction ($\beta = .33, p < .001$), supporting H3. Those who reported that they were watching television dramas more frequently were more engaged in parasocial interaction with drama characters. And parasocial interaction was in turn positively related to romantic beliefs ($\beta = .20, p = .003$), which supports H4.

These results suggest parasocial interaction mediated the effects of drama viewing on romantic beliefs. In other words, there is an indirect effect of drama viewing on romantic beliefs through parasocial interaction: standardized indirect effect was $.064$. To determine the significance of this indirect effect, a bias-corrected bootstrap method (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004) was used. One thousand bootstrap samples yielded a 99% confidence interval of $.010$ and $.151$ with an exact p value of $.002$, indicating a significant indirect effect. Thus, H2 was supported.

As for attachment styles, anxiety was positively related to drama viewing ($\beta = .13, p = .018$) and parasocial interaction ($\beta = .29, p < .001$), but not significantly to romantic beliefs ($\beta = .07, p = .259$). Thus, H5a and H5b were supported, but H5c was not. Avoidance was not significantly related to drama viewing (H6a: $\beta = -.09, p = .136$) but significantly, negatively related to parasocial interaction (H6b: $\beta = -.18, p = .001$) and romantic beliefs (H6c: $\beta = -.18, p = .004$). In sum, the more avoidant the participants were, the less they had parasocial interaction and romantic beliefs. While more anxious participants tended to view television dramas more and do parasocial interactions more, their romantic beliefs were not different depending on the anxiety levels.

5. Discussion

The present study examined the association between drama viewing and romantic beliefs, as well as how parasocial interaction and attachment styles were related to the association. According to the cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002), television viewing leads people to believe the reality television depicts as the reality they live in. Thus, we expected in the current study that more viewing of television drama would be associated with stronger beliefs about idealized romantic relationships, because the content of Korean television drama is mostly about romantic love that finally overcomes obstacles and ends happily ever after. This study also examined attachment styles and parasocial interaction. Television drama programs present stories, which can gain people's attention and engagement more effectively. Thus, parasocial interaction was taken into account as a mediator between drama viewing and romantic beliefs. The results of this study supported the mediating role of parasocial interactions. That is, more television viewing lead to more parasocial interaction, which were also linked to higher romantic beliefs. Also, attachment styles were associated with drama viewing, parasocial interaction, and romantic beliefs mostly as expected. Drama viewing, however, was not positively related to romantic beliefs; instead, weakly but negatively related to romantic beliefs.

Drama viewing increased parasocial interaction, and parasocial interaction increased romantic beliefs. Put differently, romantic beliefs were stronger among people who were more engaged in parasocial interactions with the stories and characters of television drama, and these people are more likely heavy drama viewers. The involvement level—if we can regard parasocial interaction as a form of involvement—may be indeed important for television drama influences. Some studies previously confirmed that involvement is a significant factor in cultivation effects (Rubin & Perse, 1987; Shrum et al., 2011). Because television drama has more fine-grained narratives, as compared to other programs such as news and entertainment, its effect may be more contingent upon viewers' involvement levels. That is, more involvement in drama stories may make it harder to distinguish between the real and the mediated world (Green & Brock, 2004). Also, as the accessibility model of cultivation (Shrum, 2001) suggests, higher parasocial interaction coupled with more viewing would increase the accessibility to relevant information, that is, the pieces of romantic stories.

For those who view television dramas more often and like to develop imagined relationships with the people in dramas, romantic stories and beliefs would be more frequently and thus easily activated in their mind. Increased accessibility of these concepts may lead the viewers to perceive the reality about romantic relationships as similar to romantic relationships in television dramas.

Drama viewing, however, was not positively related to romantic beliefs. Controlling for parasocial interaction made the direct relationship negative. This result is unexpected but explainable in hindsight. This negative direct relationship may reflect those who are not engaged in parasocial interaction when viewing dramas and these people may not consider dramas as romantic. Indeed, dramas also include negative aspects of romantic relationships such as conflicts, infidelity, divorce, and so on. However, drama stories still tend to emphasize true love and pure romance after all (e.g., Cho et al., 2007). Thus, for some people, television dramas present contradictory depicts of romantic relationships, which may cause ambivalent attitudes toward romance as Signorielli's (1991) study showed. The current study, however, cannot confirm whether participants viewed drama stories as contradicting or not, which is a limitation of this study. In addition, considering the small effect size of cultivation as Shanahan and Morgan (1999) found in their meta-analysis, the current relationship between drama viewing and romantic beliefs should not be considered disproving the cultivation effect.

Although there may be conflicting concepts and narratives about romantic relationships in television dramas, parasocial interactions seem more concerned with romantically idealized part of them. Considering the positive relationships between drama viewing and parasocial interaction and between parasocial interaction and romantic beliefs, those who are more strongly engaged in parasocial interactions may focus more on the romantic aspects of the dramas rather than on the negative side of them. This, again, suggests that the manner of involvement is crucial in cultivation effect: Imagine, for example, the viewers who are highly involved in television dramas with critical attitudes. They may be able to readily find fault with the unlikeliness of the stories. As these people view more and more dramas, their romantic beliefs may well be getting diminished, which explains at least partly the negative relationship between drama viewing and romantic beliefs. This interpretation that the types of involvement matter in television influence needs further studies for verification.

This study examined how attachment styles are related to the cultivation process. Studies on attachment styles show that people have certain tendencies to form and maintain close relationships (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Anxious styles are more likely to seek true love but have difficulty finding it, while avoidant styles are less likely to believe in true love and thus have difficulty forming close relationships. In the current study, attachment anxiety was positively related to drama viewing and parasocial interaction, whereas attachment avoidance was negatively related to parasocial interaction and romantic beliefs. Although there was no significant relationship between anxiety and romantic beliefs and between avoidance and drama viewing, the results regarding attachment styles were generally consistent with previous studies (Cohen, 2004; Cole & Leets, 1999; Greenwood & Long, 2011).

Specifically, anxious people, characterized as fear of abandonment, desires for closeness, and jealousy, viewed television dramas more and develop parasocial relationships more. The positive association between anxiety and parasocial interaction found in this study confirmed previous findings (Cohen, 2004; Greenwood & Long, 2011). The present study further showed that anxious people tended to view television dramas more, but they did not necessarily had more romantic beliefs. Anxious people may enjoy watching television dramas because they can get satisfaction with watching romantic stories without troubles, but they do not have more idealized beliefs about romance. Also, consistent with the previous studies (Cohen, 2004; Cole & Leets, 1999), avoidance was negatively related to parasocial interaction. In addition, avoidant people were less likely to believe in idealized romantic relationships. Considering their fear of closeness, it is understandable that avoidant people reported lower levels of parasocial interaction and romantic beliefs. The degree of avoidance, however, was not significantly related to the amount of drama viewing. Highly avoidant people seem to watch television dramas as much as non-avoidant people, but they just watch probably in a more detached manner, considering their lower levels of parasocial interaction. These results indicate that individual dispositions influence the cultivation process of television drama. Some characteristics such as anxiety may intensify the cultivation effect, while others such as avoidance may mitigate it.

There are some limitations in this study. First, the current study assumed that television drama portrayed romantic relationships in an idealized fashion. Although this assumption was based on limited yet consistent evidence (e.g., Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Jiang & Leung, 2012; Yang, 2010), it was not directly tested in the current study.

Partly due to this, we could not clearly explain reasons for the negative direct relationship between drama viewing and romantic beliefs. As pointed out earlier, the participants might not have viewed television drama as romantic as we assumed. Or, even if they agreed with the romanticism of television dramas and were highly involved in it, they might think the drama stories as unrealistic. In future studies, assessing how people consider television drama stories would yield more valuable findings in research of television influences. In addition, this study did not examine the overall television viewing. Given the importance of overall television viewing itself in cultivation effects (Gerbner et al., 2002), assessing and/or controlling for the overall television viewing might have yielded different findings. In a similar vein, the cumulative effects of television viewing as Gerbner et al. (2002) emphasized were not considered in the current study. That is, because we only assessed the current drama viewing levels, we could not take into account prior exposure to television drama in the analysis. For instance, some participants might have started viewing television dramas a lot just recently, while some other might just have stopped viewing them. Further, there may well be other narrative sources for developing romantic beliefs, such as books, movies, and personal experiences. Therefore, it seems necessary in further research to elaborate more on how to assess drama viewing and distinguish its effect from others.

Although this study proposed causal relationships based on previous findings and theoretical arguments, the present data do not provide direct evidence on the causality. For example, there is a possibility that those who hold idealized romantic beliefs tend to enjoy interacting parasocial ways, which may lead to more drama viewing. Future studies need to adopt longitudinal or experimental methods to verify causal relationships. Also, although we focused on the relationships between variables, further analyses such as moderation effects between individual characteristics and drama viewing and between drama viewing and parasocial interaction would provide interesting and valuable insights into the effects of drama viewing. Mass media provide stories that people live in. Television drama programs are important sources of romantic stories, which allow us to see and imagine how other people form, maintain, and terminate romantic relationships. The current study found partial support for the relationship between drama viewing and romantic beliefs. Involvement appeared important in that relationship. Among those who like to view television dramas, only those who enjoy having imagined interactions with the stories and characters of the dramas are likely to have idealized romantic beliefs. This tendency was maintained even after taking into consideration of individual differences, that is, attachment styles. The current study provides a plausible explanation for how television influences people's perceptions about intimate relationships and suggests intriguing future directions.

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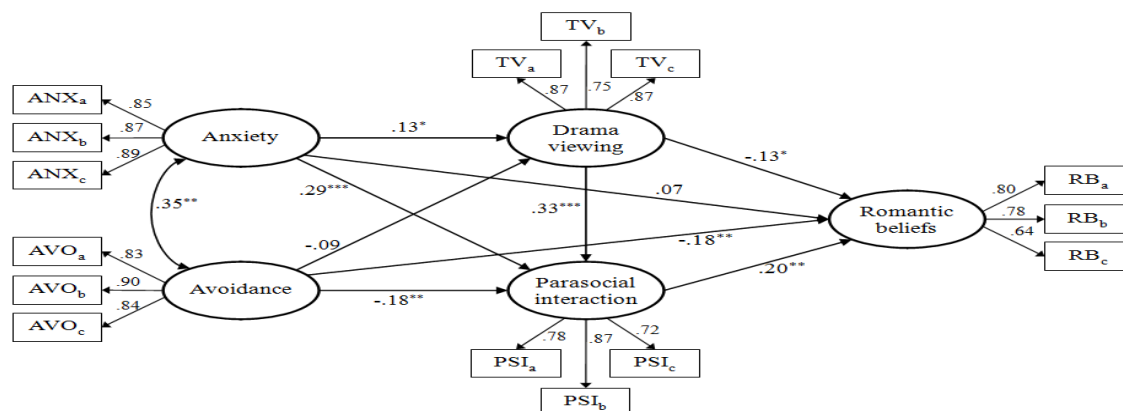


Figure 1: The results of SEM analysis. Standard coefficients (β) are presented. Indicator loadings are all significant at the level of .001.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$