

Guilty Pleasure or Social Curiosity?

**Mediated Voyeurism and the
Consumption of Reality Television**

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Background

- The voyeuristic appeal of reality programming.
 - Collins (2008, 100): Reality programs “traffic in potentially embarrassing moments of intimacy... for the audiences’ pleasurable voyeurism”
- Inconsistent results
 - **Problem with operationalization of voyeurism**
 - Beliefs regarding voyeuristic appeal of reality TV (Nabi et al. 2006)
 - Sexual appeal of reality programs (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007)
 - **Curiosity or voyeurism**
 - Social comparison



Purpose/Outline

- Provide a brief conceptual discussion of voyeurism and its relationship with reality television
- Investigate voyeurism and social comparison as potential predictors of reality consumption
- Test voyeuristic uses of television as a potential mediator
- Test whether voyeurism can be a significant predictor of consumption of fictional programs

Voyeurism & Reality TV

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- Pathological Voyeurism: Exaggerated tendency to enjoy observing **stealthily** the **erotically preferred gender** while he/she is **naked, undressing and/or engaging in sexual behavior**
 - Seeing the inaccessible
 - Power imbalance
 - Why? Stealth observation of unsuspecting subject
 - Sexual Gratification
- Reality Programs
 - The targets of the gaze are aware and complicit.
 - Not overly sexual due to broadcasting regulations (U.S.)

Revisiting the concept of voyeurism?

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Maybe I like reality TV so much because it satisfies my inner nosy person, and I do not need to be nosy about people in 'real life.'

I was a bit of an obsessive person when I was on the internet everyday catching up on other people's lives!
We are all a little too voyeuristic.

- **Common Voyeurism**
 - Seeking the inaccessible: The voyeur seeks what he or she cannot see
 - Unlike pathological voyeur, the common voyeur:
 - Will seek normatively accessible (and mostly mediated) ways of access
 - Opportunistic
 - Data voyeurism (Sullivan, 2008)
- **Electronic media has the potential to display the "personal back region" (Meyrowitz, 1985)**
- **Webcams, blogs and reality tv:**
 - Where the voyeur and the exhibitor meet.
 - Cathartic experience...



The Ajar Curtain

- Defining Negotiation of Reality
 - Viewers are aware of the contrived nature of reality programs but expect that the masks will occasionally fall
 - The voyeuristic appeal of reality programs comes from this negotiation of reality and the anticipation of those few moments when true selves are revealed.
 - The pleasure derived from this anticipation is akin to what a voyeur derives from seeing his/her subject becomes visible through the keyhole or the slightly ajar curtain.

Social Comparison

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- Social comparison tendency as a potential driver of the people watching behavior associated with reality television watching
- Individuals have a need to evaluate themselves (Festinger 1954).
- Like voyeurism, this need is satisfied by
 - Careful observation of others' behavior.
 - Making inferences about latent dispositions on the basis of manifest behavior.
- Unlike voyeurism,
 - Observation associated with social comparison is a means to an end...



Hypotheses

- H1: Voyeuristic tendencies will be positively associated with exposure to reality-based programming.
- H2: Viewers who have a higher tendency for social comparison will be more likely to watch reality programs.
- H3: After controlling for social comparison, voyeurism will be positively associated with watching reality television.
- H4a: Tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television should be positively associated with consumption of reality television.
- H4b: Tendency to engage in voyeuristic uses of television should mediate the relationship between voyeurism and reality television consumption.
- RQ1: Is voyeurism related to consumption of fictional television programming?

Methodology: Survey

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- **Participants & Procedure**

- Online panel of respondents 18 years old or older
- Response rate 16%, $n = 550$

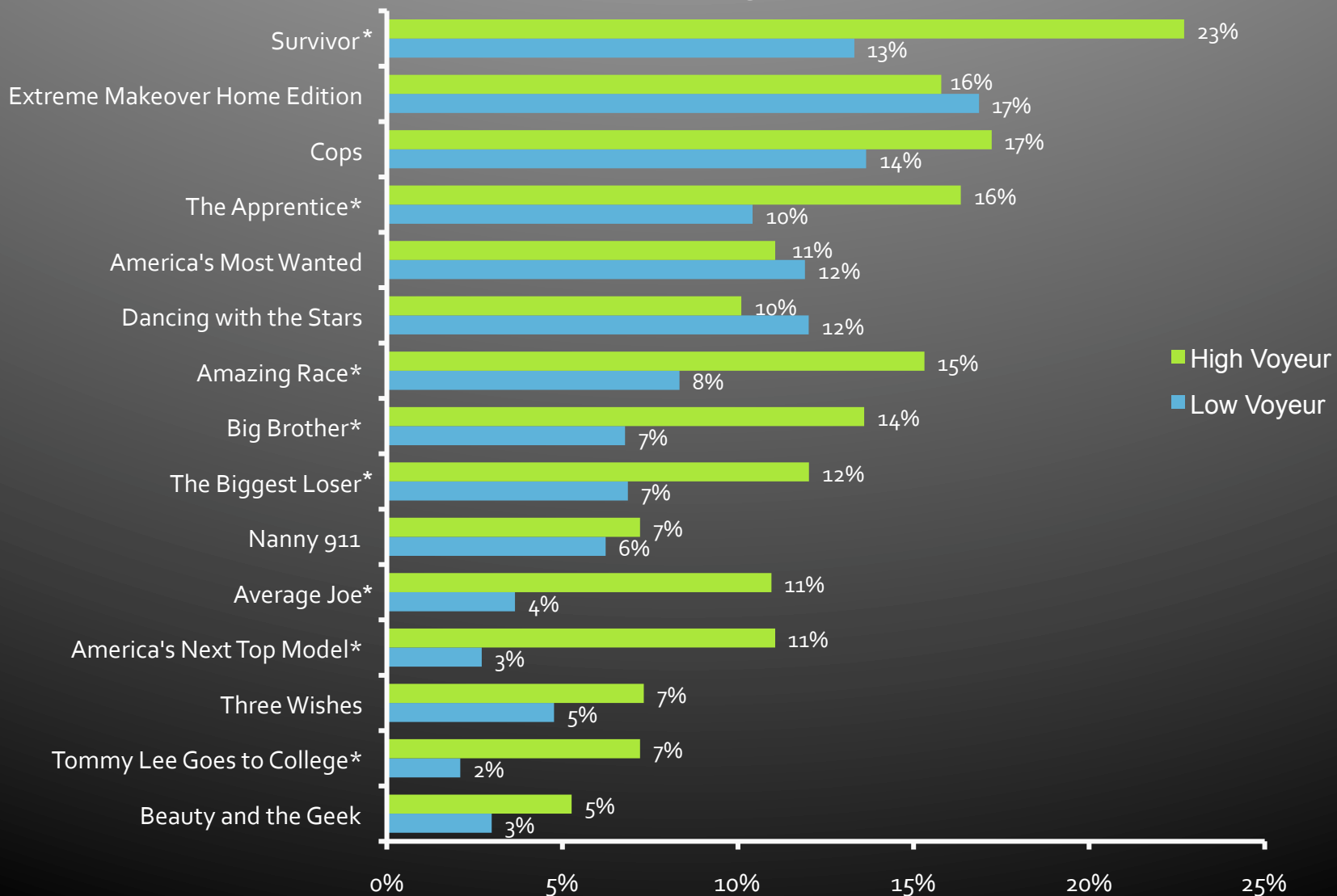
- **Measures**

- Exposure to 18 Reality Programs $M = 13.5$; $SD = 12.4$
- Exposure to 7 Fictional Programs (sitcoms, soap, crime dramas, etc) $M = 6.51$; $SD = 5.4$
- Voyeurism (8 items, $\alpha = 0.91$)
 - "If you were to read a message that was sent to somebody else"
 - "While shopping in a clothing store, you see a gap through which you can see inside a dressing room"
- Social Comparison Orientation (3 items, $\alpha = 0.72$)
- Voyeuristic uses of television
 - "I enjoy watching programs that help me get a peek into people's private moments" (3 items, $\alpha = 0.85$)

Voyeurism & Reality Programs

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Percent of Respondents Watching at Least Once a Week



Correlations

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	EXP	HTV	VOY	VTV	SOC
Exposure to Reality TV (EXP)	-	.263***	.239***	.439***	.143**
Hours of TV Viewing (HTV)		-	.083 [†]	.193***	.052
Trait Voyeurism (VOY)			-	.431***	.265***
Voyeuristic Uses of TV (VTV)				-	.293***
Social Comparison (SOC)					-

Note. N = 545, [†]p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p< .001 (2-tailed)

OLS Regression Predicting Reality TV Consumption

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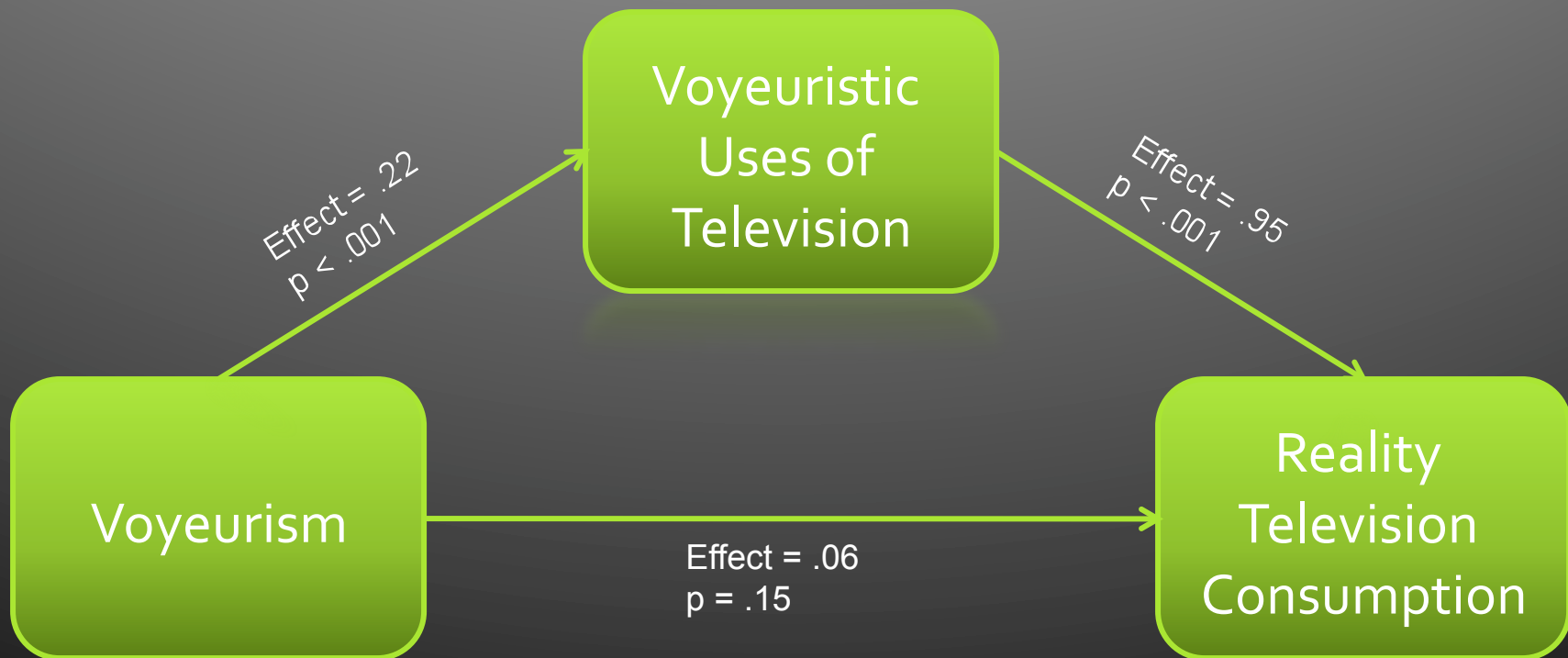
	Block 1 (β)	Block 2 (β)	Block 3 (β)
Constant	10.556**	7.829*	8.553*
Age	-.205***	-.198	-.170***
Education	-.087*	-.082	-.076*
Gender (Female)	.130**	.138**	.121**
Race (Non White)	-.037	-.032	-.028
Political Id. (Democ.)	.098*	.098*	.054
Political Id. (Indep.)	-.011	-.009	-.006
Television Viewing	.250***	.248***	.184***
Trait Voyeurism	.176***	.161***	.035
Social Comparison		.070 [†]	.005
Voyeuristic Uses of TV			.046
(Voyeuristic Uses of TV) ²			.308*
ΔR^2	.203	.004 [†]	.088***

Note. N = 545, [†]p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001 (2-tailed)

Testing the Mediation

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- Bootstrap Approach (Preacher and Hayes, 2008)



OLS Regression Predicting Fiction Programming Consumption

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	Block 1 (β)	Block 2 (β)	Block 3 (β)
Constant	3.677 [†]	1.813	-.935
Age	-0.090*	-0.026	-0.061
Education	-0.002	0.012	0.008
Gender (Female)	0.054	0.707	0.054
Race (Non White)	-0.102*	-1.782	-0.089*
Political Id. (Democ.)	0.106*	1.194	0.079
Political Id. (Indep.)	0.005	0.076	0.007
Television Viewing	0.267***	0.413	0.228***
Trait Voyeurism	0.012	-0.003	-0.084[†]
Social Comparison		0.128*	0.050
Voyeuristic Uses of TV			0.226***
ΔR^2	.096***	.008*	.038***

Note. N = 545, [†]p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001 (2-tailed)

Conclusion

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- **Contributions:**

- Understanding reality television and factors contributing to its popularity
- A case study of “mundane voyeurism”

- **Limitations:**

- Sampling Bias
- Crossectional Designs and Causality

- **Future Research:**

- Other opportunities to test “mundane voyeurism”