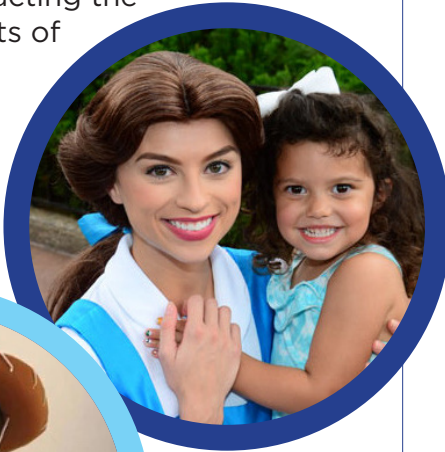


Gender and PSRs

Gender shapes young children's parasocial relationships with media characters, impacting the following aspects of PSRs:

- Parasocial interactions
- Identification
- Parasocial breakups



Research indicates that girls are more likely to engage in PSI (i.e.,

talking to media characters) with same-sex characters than boys. Similarly, boys more frequently favor friendships with male media characters versus female media characters, showing a clear identification with characters of the same-sex. Additionally, as boys and girls mature, they often experience parasocial breakups with media characters, developing new same-sex PSRs with characters who exhibit more feminine or masculine qualities than the last media character.

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A Parents' Guide to Parasocial Interactions & Relationships

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What are Parasocial Relationships and Interactions?

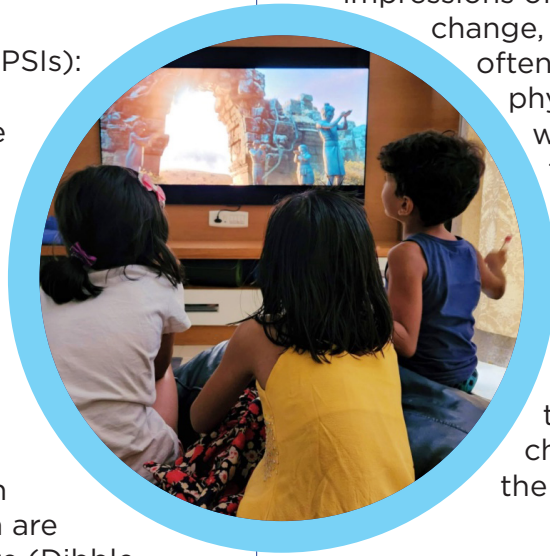
Many children and adults experience these media related phenomena, which are defined below:

- Parasocial interactions (PSIs): the illusionary give and take children experience with media characters, which occurs during media exposure (Tukachinsky et. al., 2020).
- Parasocial relationships (PSRs): the long-term, enduring sense of intimacy or connection children experience with media characters, which are often one-sided in nature (Dibble et. al., 2016).

Research reveals that PSIs are associated with PSRs in young children, as PSIs with media characters can create stronger PSR development.

Why Is This Important?

It is important for parents to be informed about PSIs and PSRs because parents' perceptions of children's PSIs and encouragement of PSRs prove to be extremely influential in the development of PSIs and PSRs among young children. Research emphasizes the broader implications of PSRs in children's learning, as children learn more from media characters they deem to be socially meaningful (Bond & Calvert, 2014).



Age and PSRs

Children experience age-related changes in parasocial relationships with their favorite media characters. As children cognitively develop, their impressions of media characters change, as younger children often focus on characters' physical attributes while older children focus on characters' behaviors. Age-related changes in PSRs can be explored within the concept of social realism, which is the likelihood that a character appears in the real world.

Research indicates that younger children have stronger PSRs with their favorite media characters than older children. However, as children age, they tend to select favorite characters that are higher in social realism. Additionally, children's maturation remains a leading contributor to parasocial breakups with media characters, as children outgrow PSRs with media characters (Bond & Calvert, 2014; Rosaen & Dibble, 2008).



Dangers of Unhealthy PSRs

Children's parasocial relationships with media characters can have significant implications for children's acceptance of others. More specifically, research has shown that PSRs and identification with media characters relates to accepting problematic behaviors. In other words, the more children become familiar with media characters and establish a bond with them the more deeply children feel connected with the media characters, regardless of their honesty and morality (Jennings et. al., 2022).

PSRs can also reinforce social constructions of identities and groups. This relates to the concept of homophily, which claims that people form stronger bonds with those who are perceived to be similar to them. Research indicates that PSRs can negatively impact children's perceptions of race and gender. PSRs have a positive association with racial attitudes, as White children are more likely to have a White racial bias, demonstrating the effects of PSRs on children's moral judgements of others. PSRs also negatively reinforce gender stereotypes, prompting children to identify unfriendly characters based on gender expectations (Jennings & Apler, 2016; Jennings et. al, 2022; Tukachinsky et. al., 2020).