Media Psychology

Lecture: Para-social relationships, fandom and celebrity endorsements.

Para-social relationships:

What are they?
The feeling of `knowing` that we have from our encounters with media celebrities.

Early methods used to measure these relationships suggested that they are the same as our actual social relationships and are a reflection of our attachment styles (Rubin et al., 1985)

Early research also noted a distinction between para-social interaction and para-social relationships.

ORIGINAL PARASOCIAL INTERACTION SCALE

Rubin, A.M. & Perse, E.M. (1987). Audience activity and soap opera involvement: A uses and effects investigation. Human Communication Research, 14, 246-268.

1. I feel sorry for my favourite newscaster when he or she makes a mistake.
2. The newscaster makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.
3. I see my favourite newscaster as a natural, down to earth person.
4. I look forward to watching my favourite newscaster on tonight's news.
5. If my favourite newscaster appeared on another television program, I would watch that program.
6. When my favourite newscaster reports a story, he or she seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
7. If there were a story about my favourite newscaster in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.
8. I miss seeing my favourite newscaster when he or she is on vacation.
9. I would like to meet my favourite newscaster in person.
10.1 find my favourite newscaster to be attractive.

Scored on a 5 point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Para-communication and Para-social processing

The term given to complex para-social viewer responses, showing how the viewer is engaged with a `character` and how reciprocal the relationship is perceived to be (Hartmann 2008). The more socially realistic the character in terms of distance and authenticity, the more likely this is.

The underlying psychological processes of P-S-I. this can be seen as a continuum allowing all potential P-S responses to mediated personae. Akin to attitudes, PSI has a cognitive, behavioural and affective component.

PSI forms the basis for PSR, which lasts beyond the viewing time.

Key concepts:

Underlying processes

Development of a PSR

Para-social interaction

Celebrity worship

Celebrity worship and personality

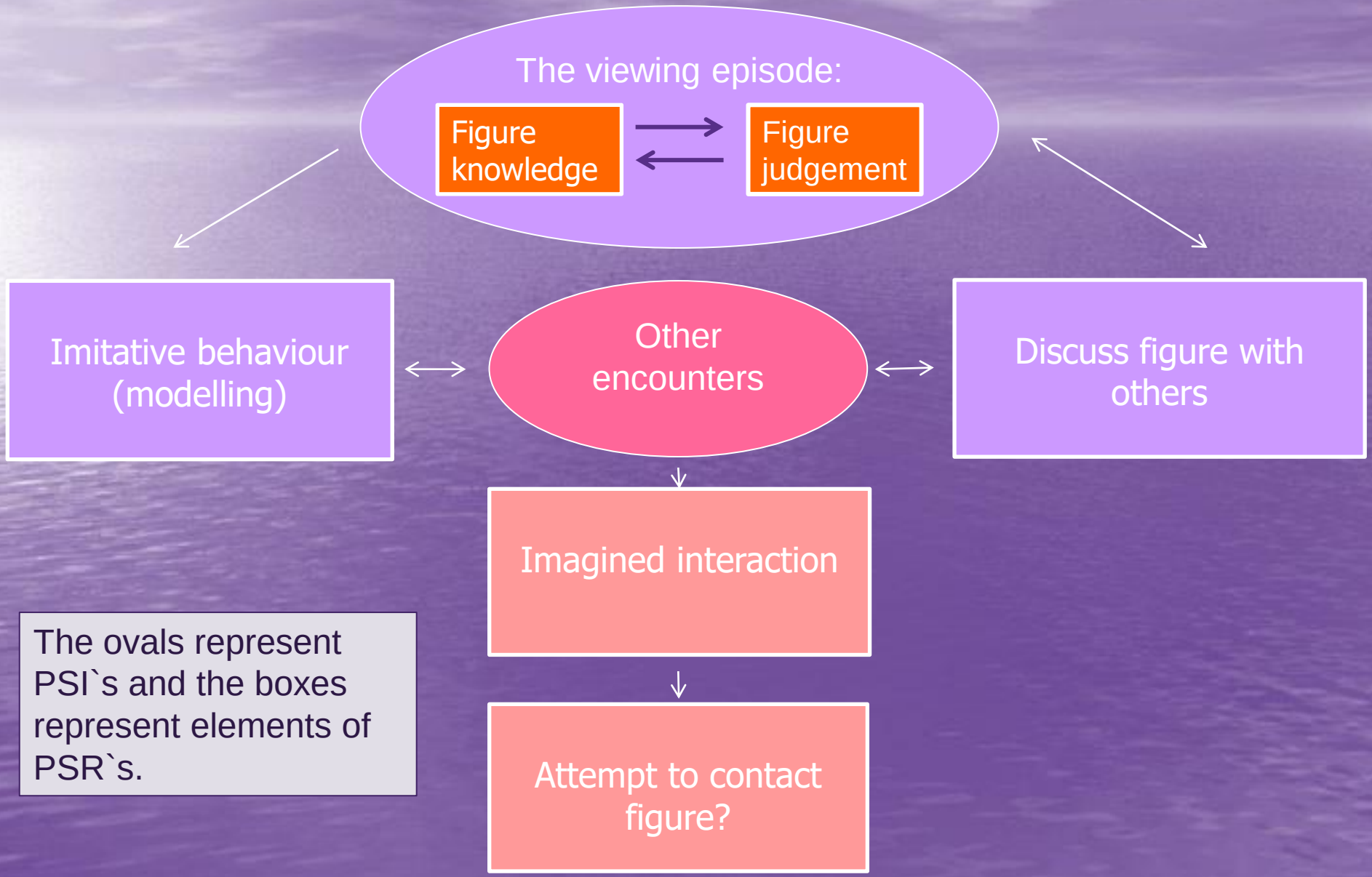
Celebrity worship and identity

Gender, ethnicity and celebrity worship

Celebrity endorsements

Para-social bereavement

Proposed psychological processes:



The ovals represent PSI`s and the boxes represent elements of PSR`s.

Perse & Rubin (1989)
The development of a PSR

1. Voluntary

They are entered into voluntarily.

Much research supports this notion.

2. Companionship

They fulfil a need for companionship.

However, Rubin et al. (1985) found little relationship between loneliness and PSR.

3. Attractive

They arise from being socially attractive. What about those characters who we dislike?

Raney (2004) we like retribution.

Three types of (MF) media figures? (Giles, 2002).

Based upon the likelihood of real life encounters.

1. First order figures.

- Real celebrities.

2. Second order figures.

- Fictional characters, but real people.

3. Third order figures.

- Cartoon characters and avatars.

Giles (2008):

Compared these 3 types with real relationships and found that on some dimensions there was no difference between the types.

E.g. similarity: individuals saw themselves as very similar. But, on others such as `meeting them` there were obvious differences.

Are there common processes at work in the formation of PSR`s?

One explanation: `The Media Equation`-
Our brains have not evolved enough to be permanently conscious of para-social relationships (Reeves & Nass, 1996). This is evident when we talk to our computer screens/devices in frustration!

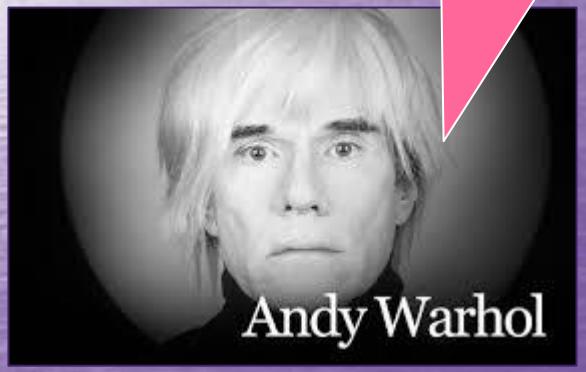
Para-social interaction

- Is interaction similar to identification? Feilitzen & Linne (1975) if we interact, do we share the same qualities, or grow to be like them?
- What is the difference between celebrity interaction and celebrity involvement?

Celebrity worship:
Where does the term come from?
Arose from the development of Media (Gamson, 1994).
Fandom originates from Religion and the collection of religion based trivia and relics sought out by religious devotees.

Fame and celebrity status

`In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes`. (Andy Warhol, 1960`s).



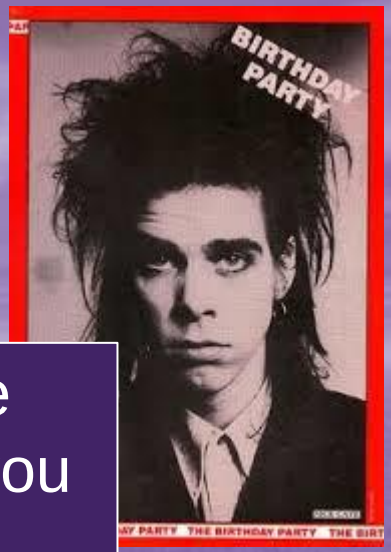
Difficult to define fame in 21st century terms, no longer necessarily the product of hard work. Becoming famous is no longer difficult and associated with brilliance or success.

Fame is the social process through which individuals become famous regardless of what they have done (Giles, 2000).

And likewise… Celebrity:

Gamson (1994) argues that celebrity is unique to the 20th and 21st century, arisen from the rapid expansion of the media, unlike any other time in history. Hence the reason for fame and celebrity status is fundamentally different from ever before.

Fans and fandom



Media is not enough to sustain fame, you need the adoration of fans; actual and /or virtual to remind you of your importance. One extreme example is Nick Cave, who used to kick his front row audience in the head, only for them to wear their bruises with pride!!!

Whilst there is evidence that `devotee`s` have been in existence since at least the 18th Century, (and before if you consider the religious perspective), classifying their types and the reasoning behind their adoration is complex.

Stever (2009): `Fandom` classification system

Eight levels of intensity ranging from broad interest to pathological attachment (even suicide).

Nine different motivations ranging from task attraction to various types of attachments.

Isolated versus interactive fans.

Your task:

Complete the CAS

THE CELEBRITY ATTITUDE SCALE

The purpose of this survey is to identify your views about famous persons. The responses you give are confidential. There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer as openly and thoughtfully as you can. For purposes of the survey we are defining the term "celebrity" as a famous living person (or one who died during your lifetime) that you greatly admire.

Who is your favorite celebrity? _____ (Please choose one famous person, as defined above).

Just in case your favorite celebrity is unknown to us, please circle one or more of the following to describe why your favorite celebrity is famous: Acting Author Artist Medicine Modeling Music News Politics Religion Royalty Radio or TV Talk Show Science Sports Other (please describe)_____

Please use the following scale in response to the items below.
5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3= Uncertain or neutral; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree

1. If I were to meet MFC in person, he/she would already somehow know that I am his/her biggest fan	1	2	3	4	5
2. One of the main reasons I maintain an interest in MFC is that doing so gives me a temporary escape from life's problems.	1	2	3	4	5
3. MFC is practically perfect in every way.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I share with MFC a special bond that cannot be described in words.	1	2	3	4	5
5. To know MFC is to love him/her	1	2	3	4	5
6. When something bad happens to MFC I feel like it happened to me	1	2	3	4	5
7. When MFC fails or loses at something I feel like a failure myself.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The successes of MFC are my successes too.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I consider MFC to be my soul mate.	1	2	3	4	5
10. When MFC dies (or died) I will feel (or I felt) like dying too.	1	2	3	4	5
11. If someone gave me several thousand dollars to do with as I please, I would consider spending it on a personal possession (like a napkin or paper plate) once used by MFC.	1	2	3	4	5
12. When something good happens to MFC I feel like it happened to me.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am obsessed by details of MFC's life.	1	2	3	4	5

The Celebrity Attitude Scale McCutcheon et al., (2002).

Originally the CWS, two main functions were identified: The entertainment/social function and the intense personal function (these were akin to Stever`s isolation versus interaction dichotomy).

Results from the CAS now demonstrate that there are three main stages:

1. Low level entertainment/social
2. Intense personal stage
3. Borderline pathological stage

The Celebrity Attitude Scale:

Low level stage:

- Watching/reading entertainment for purely entertainment and social functions

Intense personal stage:

- As above but additionally to discuss and share with other fans

Borderline pathological stage

- Empathy and over identification with the celebrity. Compulsive behaviours such as repetitive thoughts, trinket collection and obsession with details of their life

The CWS was often confused with
Celebrity Worship Syndrome, a reflection of the importance of celebrities in our lives and their reliance on fame.
`Known for being well known!`

Three main trends in research:

1. Exploring the significant qualities, characteristics and intelligence over and above the general population.
2. How celebrities affect the general public behaviour.
3. The psychological consequences of achieving fame.

More recently, a fourth: the effects on fans, particularly worshippers.

Explaining celebrity worship: Uses and gratifications Theory

Definition

- ***Uses and Gratifications Theory*** *is a popular approach to understanding mass communication. The theory places more focus on the consumer, or audience, instead of the actual message itself by asking "what people do with media" rather than "what media does to people" (Katz, 1959) . It assumes that members of the audience are not passive but take an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory also holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their needs. The approach suggests that people use the media to fulfil specific gratifications. This theory would then imply that the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification. (Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. 1974)*

The theory has to fulfil at least one of the following:

- **Identity**- it must assist in identity formation or act as a model.
- **Education**- provide a level of this.
- **Entertain**- enjoyment should ensue.
- **Social interaction-** as a result of media use.

However, the theory has been criticised for:

- Letting media off the hook for responsibility
- Do public audiences really have the free will to choose how they use media?
- Not considering the unconscious influences of the media
- Do we really use media to fulfil a need, do we have that much say over it?

Explaining celebrity worship: The Absorption – Addiction Model

There are no distinct and unique pathological/non pathological dimensions, but rather a continuum of three theoretical stages: Low levels (entertainment), social activities and finally when addictive and compulsive behaviours become evident.

Much evidence exists to support this model, particularly in relation to children and adolescents.
Additional research shows that parents and peers are instrumental in the formation of celebrity worship.
A social void can lead to absorption.
It is a good model as it explains how a normal behaviour can become dysfunctional.

Prevalence and personality:

Prevalence

- One fourth of the population scores at the intense-personal stage or above (Maltby et al., 2004).
- Is it increasing?
- Is it a worry?
- Can we use it positively?

Personality

- Is there a certain personality type?
- It has been likened to Eysenck`s personality theory (1985).
- Findings also suggest that a high level of worship can be associated with social bonding and well being.

Personality and the levels of PSI

1. E/S
   - Extraversion, depression, autonomy (adolescents) child like ideations, physical and personal environments.
2. I/P
   - Neuroticism, poor cognitive flexibility, anxiety, low body image, low security.
3. B/P
   - Psychoticism, poorer cognitive flexibility, poorer creativity.

Evidence:

Dibble & Rosean (2011)
PSR`s exist for both liked and disliked characters. In other words, they are not purely FRIENDSHIPS, adding weight to the argument that there should be a clear distinction between PSR`s and PSI.

Giles & Maltby (2004)
11-16yr old British Adolescents are provided with pseudo friends when undergoing the transition from parents to peers and increasing autonomy. But, a single focus can lead to difficulties in successful transition.

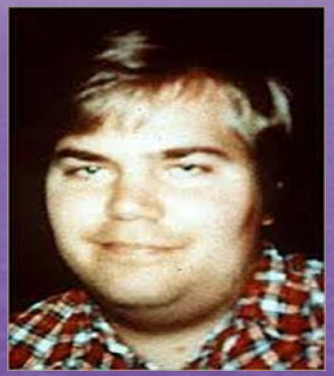
McCutcheon et al (2003) looked at the cognitive profile of celebrity worshippers and found that they did fit the Absorption-Addiction Model, in that they had cognitive deficits in verbal and visuospatial domains, in relation to flexibility and associative learning.

The three levels:
Entertainment- Social
Intense- Personal
Borderline- Pathological

Swami et al., (2009) High scores predict a willingness to undergo surgery; their body image is poor, the celebrity looks much better.

So… Why is it so important to consider celebrity worship and PSR`s?

Stage 3 of the CAS is important, as it has allowed us to examine celebrity stalkers such as Mark Chapman and John Hinckley Jnr (The Catcher in the rye)



Important in relation to identity development in children and adolescents.

Celebrity stalking

Do celebrities encourage stalking through their facebook and twitter posts?

Mishra & Mishra, (2008) define stalking as when a person is pursued either with or without their knowledge. Their privacy can be invaded, their life interrupted and they can feel very afraid.

In particular, for celebrities, their stalkers could end up being extremely dangerous. One study found that those scoring high on celebrity worship but with insecure attachments in childhood were more likely to condone stalking type behaviours.

There is a stronger relationship between the I-P subscale and stalking than the E-S subscale as predicted by the A-A model. Males more likely to condone stalking compared to older people who were less likely to condone it.

McCutcheon et al., (2006).

Children and Adolescents: the vulnerable

From even their earliest relationships, children develop a sense of self whereby their individual needs are met. Our need to belong and maintain relationships is innate.

How do normal relationships develop? By looking at an individuals social & psychological circumstances we can see that social media can fulfil affective needs; the need for affiliation and companionship. Friendships increase with social media.

Clearly `uses and gratifications` theory is not enough as an explanation, because media provides the opportunity to form ties with media figures akin to real relationships

We can reduce uncertainty in PSR`s (where no self disclosure is present) by viewing individuals in a variety of situations and through different sources so much so that we feel deeply with and for these individuals

Identity development and PSR`s

Identity development refers to `I` as different to others and `we` as part of collective identity. They are different, but also interdependent.
Erikson (1968) refers to the central task of adolescence as being identity formation, the moratorium period allowing for experimentation of roles and identities.

By adolescence individuals can acknowledge that they have multiple selves, differing in social context and role relationships. For youths, para-social relationships are the way in which they can try out all manner of identities and express themselves in a multitude of ways

Adolescents and fandom

Being a fan lets adolescents try out the qualities of the celebrity whilst in their own personality and behavioural repertoire.

This is a time where the attitudes, appearance, values and activities of individuals change drastically to become more like their fans and to be admired.

However, intense fascinations could limit their complex sense of self identity by limiting their activities in other life domains (Harrison 2006).

A particularly important function of the media is the shaping of adult occupations. Involvement with T.V. increasingly, video games, allows exploration of differing careers. however… think CSI

Is there/could there be a problem with this?

Sexuality and gender

Sexuality

- Older adolescence- a struggle between intimacy and isolation, PSR`s enable vicarious participation in imaginary relationships.
- Giles & Maltby (2004) emphasise the importance as transition from parents to autonomy, to romance.

Gender

- Boys identify with attachments to individuals who they want to be/be like, whereas girls form romantic attachments to try out the role safely.
- Both sexes use the roles as romantic scripts (Pasquier 1996).
- However, little opportunity for gay or lesbian adolescents.

Apart from individual identity, gender identity is also social:
PSR`s affect our perceptions of the gender of others
Hoffner (1996).
For males, intelligence, attractiveness and strength were qualities leading to stronger PS attitudes. For females the single factor determining social identity was attractiveness.

This shows the power of media in reinforcing the social norms of appearance being of paramount importance in females.

In addition, males were often portrayed as aggressive and violent (Huesmann et al (2003).
The implications are huge!

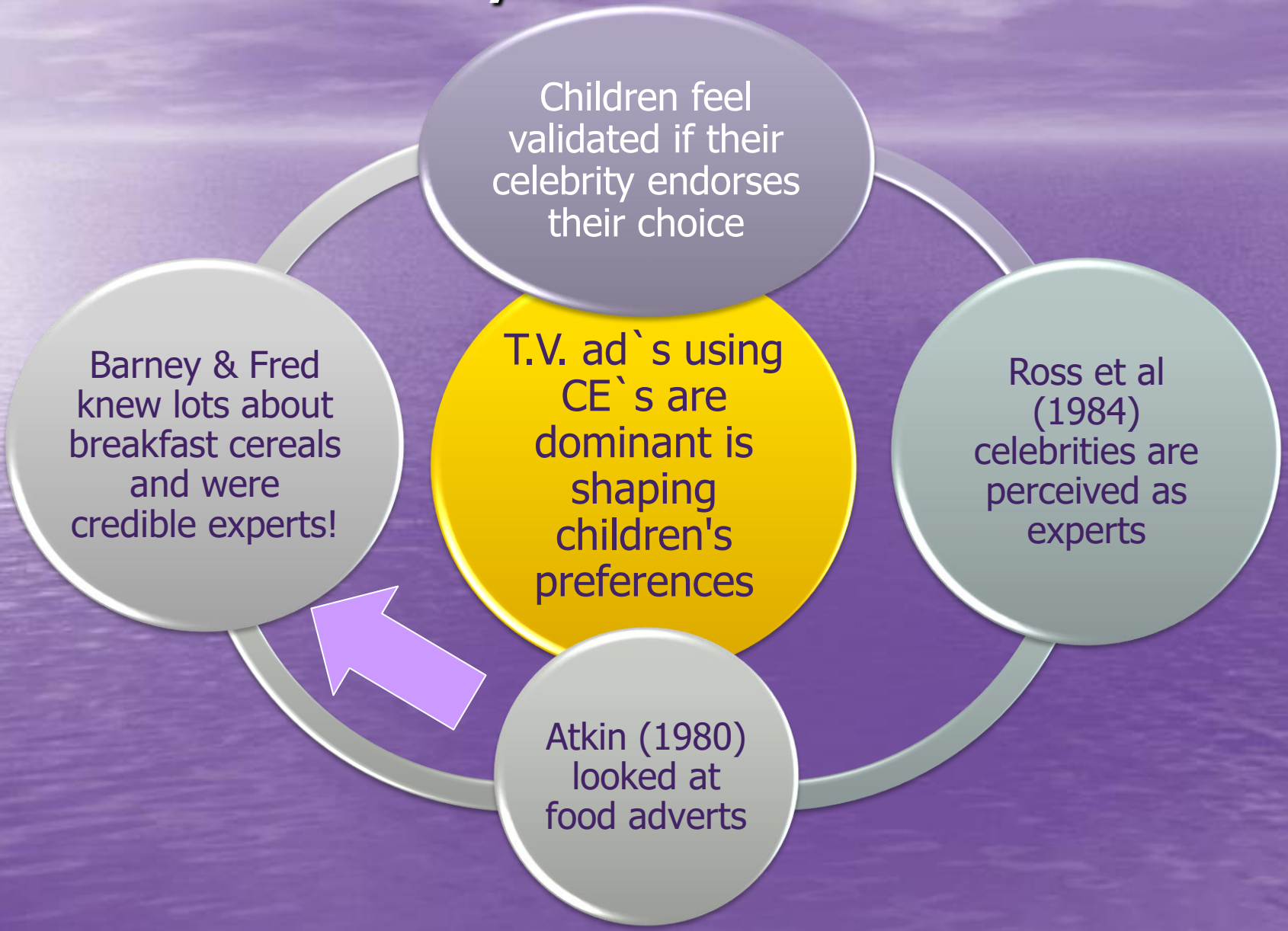
Ethnicity and others

Coffee break… and your task:

In groups, find an example of a celebrity endorsed product reported within the literature.
Be prepared to discuss this in psychological terms.

After the break:
Celebrity endorsements and para-social bereavements.
Implications and future directions within research.

Celebrity endorsements



Celebrity endorsements

Gary Lineker has represented Walkers Crips since the 1990`s. It is difficult to disassociate him from them.

Celebrity endorsements work via meaning transfer (McCracken 1986) wherein the meaning of a person transfers to the product they endorse. For example Gary Lineker is a clean cut sportsperson, good to represent good clean cut potato chips!

Celebrity endorsements

Do they work?

And in social media

Therefore… we know that CE`s are widely used and according to the `match up` model (Til & Busler, 2000) celebrities are most useful when there is a commonality between them and the product.
Til et al. (2008) in experimental studies, found support for celebrities as unconditioned stimuli, and the more congruent, the greater the conditioning.

Amos et al. (2008) meta-analysis of 32 studies of endorsement effects, reported three factors as best predictors of success: trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness, highlighting the importance of using the right face…

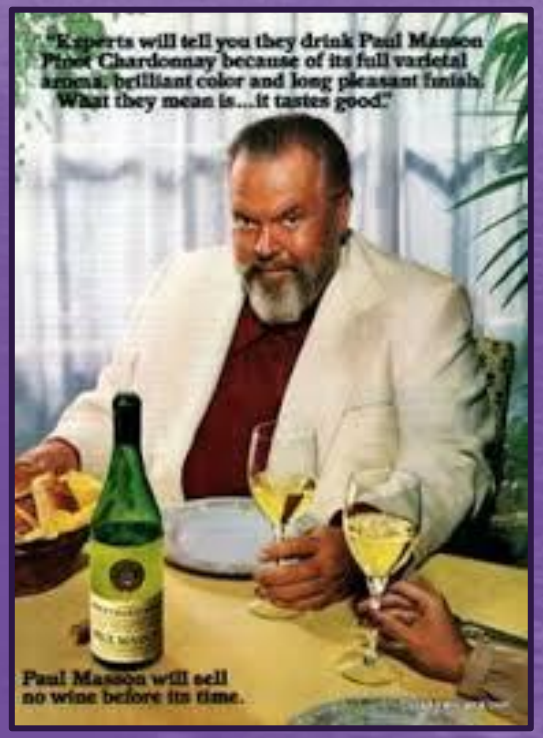
If we perceive individuals as attractive then we will purchase the product as we wish to identify with them and become a member of their group.

However…

Any potential problems?
If one celebrity is strongly associated, could another celebrity replace them?
And, the converse, Kate Moss represents Chanel and Top-Shop simultaneously (Pompitakpan 2012).

Alperstein (1991) found that peoples attitudes to celebrities were often impaired as a result of commercials they had appeared in, particularly if they were viewed as doing so for financial gain.

But, if products were integrated into everyday personae they were more successful. E.g. pregnant presenter recommending a particular product.



Para-social bereavement

Why do we develop such strong irrational attachments to certain individuals?

Eyal & Cohen (2006) para-social breakups and deaths represent enforced termination of friendships, which can result in regret, loneliness and a sense of loss.

The hyper-personal model of computer-mediated communication (CMC; Walther, 1996).CMC a natural part of our culture?

Para-social bereavement:

Princess Diana (Eyal & Cohen 2006)

Michael Jackson: Who was the real M.J.?

Research demonstrates that when death occurs, the enforced termination of a PSR, individuals experience real regret and loneliness.

Giles (2002) the tripartite typology is oversimplified because our PSR`s extend for years beyond death. This suggests that PSR`s can be just as strong for dead people.

Additionally, it is also problematic because it is limited to visual media, and not who we may actually make contact with. Furthermore, it relates to characters in books etc., which rely on our interpretation. This is why we are often disappointed in films from books.

Future/continued directions for research:

Media and the nature nurture debate

Affective Disposition Theory (Zillmann, 1996), a narrative of moral judgements which affects our viewing pleasure.
Simulation Theory (Oatley, 1994) think of the matrix…
The Psychological Theory of Play (Oerter, 1999)

The Investment Model (Rusbult et al., 2001) and Psychological Well Being.

Para-social relationships and body image