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## Chapter #10

### ATTACHMENT STYLES AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: A COLLECTIVIST SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE

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#### ABSTRACT

In this study we investigate parasocial relationships in media; more specifically we explore why audience members fashion attachments with television personalities. The study aligns with previous research in the area by Cole and Leets (1999) that looked at attachments formed with media figures and the correlation to level of attachments in real-life relationships. In their study, Cole and Leets (1999) used a three-dimensional attachment scale that included anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and secure, and found those with higher insecurity or unstable real-life relationships have stronger parasocial relationships. We surveyed university age respondents and we used the same scales as Cole and Leets (1999) to examine whether in Kuwait, where dating violates social norms and looser bonds are found outside of the home, that stronger parasocial relationships with media personalities will be found because of the need to fulfill relationship needs outside of family. Our hypotheses in this chapter is that higher levels of anxious-ambivalents and avoidants both will be found due to the strict collectivist nature of the society forcing many to compensate for lack of real world relationships by forming mediated bonds. Moreover, we posited and discovered that that these two groups also showed the highest levels of parasocial relationships in our sample.

*Keywords:* parasocial, attachment styles, Kuwait, collectivism, media.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This study proposes to investigate how parasocial relationships in media are formed in a traditional collectivist society like Kuwait and how they are affected by attachments found in real world relationships. We chose Kuwait for this study as it is seen as a highly collectivist (Hofstede, 2001), conservative society that provides a maximally different context from that of the United States and the West where most parasocial relationship studies were conducted (Bond & Calvert, 2014; Cohen, 2004; Cohen, 1997, Cole & Leets, 1999; Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2015; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Rizzo, 2005; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Woodley & Movius, 2012). A Parasocial Relationship (PSR) is defined as a one-sided relationship that an audience member fashions with a television personality (Bond & Calvert, 2014; Cohen, 2004; Cohen, 1997, 1999; Eyal & Cohen, 2006). Part of the schema of a PSR is loyalty to a given television program manifested in regularly viewing of a show. The term parasocial relationship was originally coined in Horton and Wohl (1956) where they describe it as a “seeming face-to-face relationship” (p. 215).

The date of the study might delineate the definition of face-to-face. At that time the researchers used television personalities like Steve Allen and Liberace to help define the type of persona the audience seeks when establishing a bond with a celebrity. In the era of

Horton and Wohl, the PSRs perused were often ones where the personality spoke directly to the television and the studio audiences, creating an illusion that the PSR was reciprocal and thus creating a greater sense of intimacy. This can in fact be compared to modern day talk show programs. For example, the widely popular television show *Oprah Winfrey* has some of the same attributes described in the Horton study of the *Steve Allen Show*. Winfrey has often addressed the home audience as if she were speaking directly with them (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Woodley & Movius, 2012, Dibble et al., 2015). Lewis (2000) expressed this idea as “The line separating the persona and the audience is further blurred if the media character steps out of the particular format of the show and literally blends with the studio audience” (p. 12).

Talking to the screen through close-ups such as Winfrey does provides a human-side to the performer and engages the TV viewers just as it does the studio audience, thus giving the impression that the performer is a regular person and so solidifying the PSR (Lewis, 2000). Addressing the audiences directly is also something that is quite prevalent in children’s programming, with many of those characters being scripted to speak directly to young children in the viewing audience (Bond & Calvert, 2014). In fact, it isn’t just about adults; Bond & Calvert (2014) noted that the children as young as 21 months old can develop strong parasocial relationships. So the phenomenon of parasocial ties is not something exclusive to older audiences only. Correspondingly, children were able to make bonds with anthropomorphic characters such as puppets and cartoon characters with reinforcement of the relationship taking place with toys, parental encouragement and repeated exposure to those characters.

Researchers have suggested that viewers, including children, form strong PSRs as a result of the perceived realism of the program and also due to the realism of the characters and the physical and social attractiveness of these personalities (Bond & Calvert, 2014; Camella, 2001; Eyal & Cohen, 2006). It is believed that the viewer suspends disbeliefs about the fictionalization of the television characters even when they know that the television program is scripted as is the case for many talk shows, live programs, and so-called reality shows. Our study aims to look at the impact of these relationships in a collectivist society such as Kuwait and to examine how these relationships are impacted by certain attachment types as described in section 2.1 of our literature review.

## 2. BACKGROUND

It is quite often the most socially popular or desirable characters who become the subject of PSRs for the dedicated audience (Bond & Calvert, 2014). Eyal and Cohen (2006) examined this phenomenon through the highly popular show *Friends*. ‘Rachel’ an attractive character on the program was rated as the most popular and was ranked as the person with whom the majority of those surveyed formed a bond. ‘Ross’ on the other hand, was rated as the least popular character and who had the least amount of associated PSRs. Other factors that were found to contribute to the strength of PSRs include shared values, background similarity, identification and communication styles, and perceived homophily with the character (Bryant & Oliver, 2009; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Slade, Narro & Buchanan, 2014; Manusov & Harvey, 2001). Shared values, identification and predictability help to reinforce the bond to the TV persona and create a sense of empathy whereby the viewer wishes nothing but success and happiness for the character, as if they were personally invested or had some obligation to their favorite star (Lewis, 2000).

Some audience members even come to the conclusion that they know their TV personality *as well as* they know their own friends. Deep knowledge of a favorite character

would generally not be shared among casual viewers of the program. Additionally, a committed fan will generally believe that his or her knowledge of their favorite TV star or celebrity is more expansive than that of a casual viewer or fan. This knowledge would not just be limited to a character's traits, but could also include voice, dress and appearance (Bond & Calvert, 2014; Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Another aspect of the bond of the PSR is the belief that the performer or character would fit neatly into one's social circles (Lewis, 2000). Cole & Leets (1999) describes parasocial relationships as closer than acquaintances, but further than friends or family. This idea came to be referred to as a 'quasi-friendship'. This quasi-friendship is to a certain extent built on the predictability of the character. Just as the audience may know how friends and family would react and behave in a given scenario, so is the case for the TV star. In a scripted show, the characters can be more formulaic than those in real life. Consequently, a TV friend is often more predictable than a close associate in the real world (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In fact, it is found that the strength of the PSR will increase as the audience member is better able to predict the behavior of a given TV personality (Cole & Leets, 1999). This can, in turn, lead to an increased feeling of intimacy within the PSR, an occurrence that was previously described: "They know such a persona in somewhat the same way they know their chosen friend: through direct observation and interpretation of his appearances his gestures and voice, his conversation and conduct in a variety of situations" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 216).

Eyal and Cohen (2006) concluded that PSRs are a strong part of social relationships of many TV viewers with some reporting idolizing and admiring their favorite TV personality (Camella, 2001). Early research has even found little differences in terms of psychological rewards between real world interpersonal relationships and PSRs (Lewis, 2000). However, in general, PSRs do not replace relationships audience members have with friends or family.

Furthermore, the PSR does not discontinue once the program has ended for the week but is a long term relationship that continues beyond the broadcast (Dibble et al., 2015). There are other outlets that allow the audience member to continue the one-sided relationship. There are entire industries around stars and celebrities that help fans immerse into their PSRs. These include press agents, entertainment shows and magazines (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This is further reinforced through the Internet where fans have dedicated websites for their favorite stars, and media outlets and networks establish official websites and social media pages for the shows and their many characters. These sites are full of interactive options such as e-mails, chats, blogs, and so forth. Americanidol.com for example, allows fans of the hit reality show to view behind the scene photographs from the latest episodes, peruse biographies of contestants, and discuss and vote for their favorite singer. Reality shows like *American Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance*, go further than other variety programming by asking the audience to shape the content of the program and thusly the future of their PSRs, by voting to keep contestants 'alive' or to vote them off.

The actor himself may be a part of the PSR strengthening process through appearances in talk show programs, interviews in magazines and personal appearances at award shows. The audience members thus develop a greater sense of closeness to the persona and a stronger belief that they know more about the star, bringing the PSR even closer (Cohen, 2004).

The viewer also has also an important role to fill as a loyal viewer of the show by keeping up with events affecting a favorite TV personality and by not attempting to form bonds with a program that may be out of his or her intellectual reach such

as the example of a child forming bonds with a persona in an adult show, or vice versa (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Some viewers are said to use mediated relationships as a substitute for interpersonal ones based on a fantasy provided by a given TV character where they experience achievement vicariously through the character's TV experiences. Consequently, the TV personality becomes more than a quasi-friend, but rather a role model emulated by his dedicated fan (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This is best depicted through the PSRs formed with famous rock stars that go to great lengths to present a glamorous, hedonistic life through their music videos and on the concert stage.

In developing and sustaining mediated bonds, many viewers tend to surrender to the experiences of the characters in the fictional situation presented in the program rather than attempting to theorize how they would handle the situation themselves. Therefore, and in this respect, the PSRs serve an escapist role (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Though given that the PSR is to a large extent based on attractiveness and homophily, it would be reasonable to assume that the viewer may act similarly in an analogous circumstance.

An important question for inquiry is why do some audience members form parasocial relationships while others do not? Cohen (1997) reports that some people use PSRs as a substitution for a lack of interpersonal relationships or as a result of insecurity in their romantic relations. Some studies have found that forming PSRs can help battle loneliness (Adam & Sizemore, 2013). However, subsequent research has cast serious doubts on these propositions. Both Rubin et al (1985) and Cohen (1997) found no correlation between loneliness and the degree to which an audience member fashions PSRs (Cohen 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999; Rubin et al., 1985). Contrary to this compensation argument, it was found that many in secure relationships, especially women, fashion strong PSRs and could use these ties as extensions of their romantic relationships (Adam & Sizemore, 2013). Adam and Sizemore (2013) described scenarios where audience members fashioned romantic parasocial relationships with media characters including strong viewer romantic-based PSRs to characters in the film franchise *Twilight*. Along this line, Cohen (2004) has even suggested that in general the same skills required in sustaining real-world relationships are needed to sustain PSRs.

PSRs have also been found to be dependent on the viewer's gender. While females showed no preferences in the types of personalities they fashion PSRs with, men showed a preference for forming bonds with newscasters first, followed by talk show hosts, and then by sitcom stars (Lewis, 2000). In general, women formed stronger PSRs than men, and reported higher attachment levels, which can lead to a feeling of loss when a TV show is cancelled and a favorite TV character ceases to exist (Eyal & Cohen, 2006).

Self-esteem is another variable that was investigated in the context of PSRs. Self-esteem was not found to be a strong predictor in establishing PSRs, and people with high PSRs were not found to exhibit low self-esteem. Interestingly however, those with high self-esteem tended to form attachments to comedians (Cohen, 2004).

One of the most significant aspects of PSRs is that they effectively illustrate the extent to which media can influence opinions of the audience (Baldwin, Perry & Moffitt, 2004). In one study, the influence on homophobia after forming PSRs with gay male characters was investigated. Studies have shown that a significant reduction in negative attitudes toward homosexuals whether coworkers, friends or classmates was observed when a heterosexual forms PSRs with homosexual characters or celebrities.

While a large body of research has focused on PSRs and television, a number of scholars have looked at other areas. For example, Burnett and Beto (2000) examined PSRs in the context of romance novels. The results were in general similar to what was found in television-related PSRs. The writing style of the novel was found to be a factor in the way

PSRs were established. For instance, an emphasis on the attractiveness of a given character is a paramount editorial rule in romance novels. Attractiveness is one of the key components that studies have listed as desirable to the viewer when forming a TV or film-based PSR (Adam & Sizemore, 2013). Women, in particular, identified with, and established stronger bonds to female characters. Many in fact felt that they empathized greatly with their favorite literary heroine and expressed sadness when the book ended (Burnett & Beto, 2000).

### **2.1. Attachment and Parasocial Relationships**

Cole and Leets (1999) support the proposition that a key predictor of forming PSRs is the level of attachment in interpersonal relationships. The way in which a person engages and forms attachments in adult relationships originates in the relationship the person had with their primary caregiver(s) as a child, generally the mother. Children are said to go through various stages of separation from their caregiver that include protest, despair and detachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Konishi & Hymel, 2014; Nathanson & Manohar, 2012). Based on research, a caregiver who is overly critical and withdrawn or rejects their child would normally produce an adult classified as an avoidant. A caregiver who is inconsistent with her child, consoling them when they cry, but sometimes not interfering, would produce an adult who is anxious-ambivalent. Finally, caregivers who are consistent with the child would raise a secure adult (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Konishi & Hymel, 2014; Nathanson & Manohar, 2012).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) theorized the personality types identified in their study could predict adult romantic love behavior. In their study, 620 respondents were asked how they felt about their interpersonal and romantic relationships. Their dating status was also surveyed, including the length of the current or last relationship. Their survey also included information on childhood experiences, degree and type of attachment to the mother and the father, as well as the nature of the relationship between the two parents. No differences were found in attachment styles among respondents who had parents who were divorced as children and those who didn't, or even among those who had long-term separation from their parents and those who did not. In fact, the key indicator of attachment style found was the quality of the relationship with each parent, while the only gender-related difference noted was that respondents tended to judge their opposite-sex parent more kindly.

What researchers also found was that those who fit the classification of secure had longer lasting relationships than other personality types, and were characterized as happy and trusting. Furthermore, secure adults also reported they could accept their partners' character flaws. Those categorized as avoidants, on the other hand, had a fear of intimacy, had rocky relationships that lasted on average half as long as those maintained by secures. Lastly, anxious-ambivalents described relationships based on obsession and sexual attraction and like avoidants, experienced relationships that were full of highs and lows (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Nathanson & Manohar, 2012).

In general, secure respondents saw people as kind-natured and believed that they themselves were persons easy to get along with and were generally liked by others. Anxious-ambivalents described themselves as misunderstood, underappreciated and found it hard to find a partner who would commit to a lasting relationship. Most avoidants reported that they could get along better alone and that one has to be cautious when it comes to interacting with others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Additionally, secure respondents tended to feel secure in their interpersonal relationships and were seen as more trustworthy and were more inclined to maintain stable relationships. Avoidant types tended to avoid relationships, especially the romantic ones,

and found it harder to socialize. They also held mostly negative attitudes toward relationships and were increasingly upset when relationships ended. Anxious-ambivalent respondents had negative attitudes about themselves and were insecure in their relationships and had high levels of anxiety about abandonment, but nonetheless they reported a strong need to be loved. Anxious-ambivalent respondents tended to also fall in love more easily and more often, and were more likely to be jealous and appeasing during tensions in the relationship (Cohen, 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999).

The three types of attachment styles described above were found to be strong predictors of the depth and nuances of PSRs. For example, anxious-ambivalents were most likely to form PSRs. This was explained by the fact that anxious-ambivalents may find comfort in the stability of their favorite TV personality or celebrity (Cohen, 1997, Cole & Leets, 1999). Correspondingly, homophily was not found to be an indicator in the PSRs of anxious-ambivalents as many anxious-ambivalents formed bonds with stable-type personalities. The same study found avoidants to be the group least likely to fashion PSRs something that parallels their attitudes toward real life relationships. Secure individuals had moderate ties to TV personalities, often forming stronger bonds when they were in a relationship with someone they did not trust. In this case, the stability of a trustworthy TV character may serve a compensatory role for an unstable real-life relationship. Finally, avoidants were unlikely to fashion PSRs even when their own real-life relationships were unstable. This was explained by the fact that avoidants may have given-up on relationships and felt that even media-based relationships left little room for trust (Cole & Leets, 1999).

Attachment styles were also found to play a large role in the depth of the PSRs. Attachments styles can indicate and shape the audiences' feelings and in turn the nature of the bonds with a favorite TV personality. Just like real-world relationships, PSRs may fulfill existing attachment needs (Cohen, 2004; Cole & Leets, 1999; Rubin et al., 1985).

Cohen (2004) and Eyal and Cohen (2006) investigated this area. Cohen (2004) for example, used the final episode of *Friends* and looked at what happens when the PSR comes to an end. He theorized that those with secure attachments would react with less intensity to the end of a PSR. Anxious-ambivalents would have the most adverse reaction to the ending of a PSR, and finally avoidants would have difficulty coping afterwards. The length of the parasocial relationship could also predict the level of difficulty in dealing with the loss as time tends to strengthen relationships. Just as theorized, it was found that anxious-ambivalents faced the greatest difficulty in dealing and coping with the loss of a PSR. This is supported by the fact that that anxious-ambivalents are more likely to be susceptible to intense anxiety when real world ties end. Interestingly, neither gender nor current relationship status predicted reaction to the end of a PSR. However, contrary to what was suggested by Cohen, there were no significant differences between secures and avoidants in how they reacted to the loss of the PSR, with both groups reporting low anxiety when their PSRs ended (Cohen, 2004).

Cohen's (2003) self-report study measured and assessed reactions of teens and adults, both males and females to the dissolution of their parasocial relationships. Cohen (2003) hypothesis matched his conclusion, that women have stronger parasocial bonds and a breakup is equally as difficult for men as for women.

## **2.2. Attachment, Parasocial Relationships and Culture**

That culture sanctions and determines, or at the very least affects social interaction is a well-established fact in the social sciences literature and has been the focus of numerous discourse and research. From the earliest work of Freud on the internalization of social moral values, and Parsons and Shils' (1951) theory of action, to the more recent work of

Triandis (1995, 2001) in the area of cross-cultural social psychology, the important role of the cultural context in shaping how people perceive, react, and interact with others is well recognized. For example, in his formulation of social exchange theory, (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Wikhamn & Hall, 2012) argued that the social context in which exchange takes place defines the rules and guidelines governing exchange and determines the value of what is exchanged as well as the social status of exchange partners and reciprocity. Hofstede (1980), in his large study of work-related values, has found significant differences across cultures in the way people work, interact and respond to organizational processes.

Our study is anchored in the understanding of the importance of culture for interpersonal and parasocial relationships. In particular, we focus on collectivism, and for the attachment styles, we use the three types considered in Cole and Leets (1999), namely, secure, anxious-ambivalents and avoidants.

Levels of attachment and reaction to separation, autonomy and commitment, interdependence and independence are some of the characteristics that determine a collectivist versus individualistic social cohesion (James & Gilliland, 2013; Kagitcibasi, 1994; Petrakis, 2014; Triandis, 1995).

In collectivist societies, the family unit is based on commitment, attachment and interdependence. The family meets the social needs of the individuals in the group, which helps form a sense of identity, commitment and belonging. Alternatively, in an individualist setting, the emphasis is on the individual, his/her identity, achievement, and independence (James & Gilliland, 2013; Hofstede, 1991; Petrakis, 2014; Pyke & Bengtson, 1996; Triandis, 1995).

In their research on young Adults Attachment Styles, You and Malley-Morrison (2000) compared attachment types in a sample of Caucasian Americans and a sample of collectivist Koreans. They found high amounts of preoccupied attachment styles in the Korean sample that were characterized as having high levels of feelings of unworthiness and greater emphasis on valuing others rather than the self. In a similar study of relationships of Korean students and American students, the former reported less intimate friendships than those found in the American sample (You & Malley-Morrison, 2000). The Korean students in this research reported a preoccupied attachment style where others were seen as untrustworthy and thus the subject felt the need to protect themselves from others. The authors note that being from a collectivist society one would expect to find higher levels of trust and attachment to the family. However, this level of closeness did not cover friends or peers, which is contrary to what was found in the American sample. The results of the research are explained by the in-group/out-group distinction that characterizes collectivist societies where high levels of attachment and trust are familial traits and are social experiences not to be shared with outsiders and can be traits inherent to closed societies where people seldom form bonds with those outside the group, family or community (Dakhli, Khorram & Vora, 2007; Earley, 1994; Erez & Earley, 1993; Marková & Gillespie, 2008; Yamagishi, 2011).

These results were further validated by the Schmitt, et al., (2004) study that was conducted with researchers across 62 countries. In this large cross-cultural investigation, student samples from Asia, South America, Western Nations, the Middle East, and Africa were included. Researchers discovered that secure attachment was the most widely reported type with 79% of the cultures in the sample reporting this attachment style as the most prevalent. However, in the collectivist cultures of East Asia, the preoccupied attachment was especially high and this attachment style was also present in the East African cultures. The authors of the study attributed these differences to the predominance of preoccupied attachment (insecure) in collectivist cultures.



### **2.3. Kuwait Culture and Identity**

Kuwait is a unique collectivist society and thusly offers a fitting context for the study of PSRs and attachment. Culture has been defined as a collection of humans who share the same attributes including behavioral patterns, folkways, mores and traditions in addition to the shared symbols, values, beliefs and meanings. These shared values unite individuals and create a sense of belonging to a cohesive group (Al-Jassar, 2009; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Leighton, 1982). Within a culture, identity is shaped through the passing on of traditions and values. Through childhood, identity is shaped through understanding one's role and membership in society and through active participation in society (Berns, 2013; Gay, 1978; Hofstede, 1991). During the development process the question of "who I am" is raised and internalized. As the child grows in the course of the adolescent stage, their social networks broaden and they begin to examine themselves from a third-person standpoint as part of the socialization process. The individual is constantly comparing themselves to those within their peer group and evaluating themselves based on homophily with other members of their social network using such social markers as race, religion, peer group, community, parental guidance, language and nationality to accomplish this (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Berns, 2013; Phinney, 1991). Deviations from the social norms and values of the reference group could lead to negative self-image, lower self-esteem and social alienation. Aligning one's identity with the norms of the larger social group helps the person reduce this inner conflict, and conforming ones behavior to behavioral norms becomes part of a child's socialization process. Children gain an understanding of their roles, right and wrong, and understand the world around them through the development stages of growing and through their active experiences and participation, which are often contingent upon rewards and reprimands (Berns, 2013; Rosenberg, 1979).

As a subculture within the larger Arab/Islamic culture, Kuwaitis define themselves as a nation-state whose citizenship is descended from paternal lineage and it is rare for non-citizens to obtain citizenship (Al-Enezi, 2002; Barakat, 1993; Dinkha, Abdulhamid, Abdelhalim, 2008, Loew, n.d). Individuals in the society often view themselves from the viewpoint of religion, with Islam being dominant, social class, and citizenship. Because of this, there is value in being Kuwaiti and most Kuwaitis feel they have a privilege over others because of their nationality (Dinkha & Dakhli, 2009). Consequently, there is a tendency to abide by the norms, customs, and traditions of the Kuwaiti society, even if these are not consistent with the inner authentic self (Dinkha et al., 2008).

There are five recognized status levels within the Kuwaiti society. These are generally based on historical family lineage, affluence and material wealth. The male gender is also associated with status in Kuwait and only recently did Kuwaiti women secure the right of participation in political life (Dinkha et al., 2008; Tetreault & Al-Mughni, 1995, USA Today, 2005). Women's status is linked to motherhood and home life. However, due to high standards of living, foreign maids and nannies traditionally serve as supplemental parents for many Kuwaitis. These maids and nannies usually live with the family and each Kuwaiti family may have three to eight helpers at home who are responsible for all the housework and for taking care of and helping to raise Kuwaiti children (Shah, Al-Qudsi & Shah, 1991; Sukrithan, 2009). Consequently, Kuwaiti mothers may not serve consistently as the primary caregiver and it could be theorized that these children may not be secure as a result. Also, other social trends and norms may lead to avoidant attachments or anxious attachments in romantic relationships and friendships in adult life. At the same time, strong collectivist cultural norms mandate strong commitment to the family (James & Gilliland, 2013; Petrakis, 2014; Pyke & Bengtson, 1996).

We integrate the literature on attachment styles, parasocial relationships and collectivism to develop our main hypotheses in this chapter. We postulate that we will find a high preponderance of insecure in the form of anxious-ambivalents and avoidants due to the collectivist nature of the Kuwaiti culture. This is analogous to what was previously observed in the study of collectivist societies in Schmitt et al. (2004). In our study, the predominance of insecure is anticipated because many Kuwaitis, and those living in Kuwait, are expected not to form strong bonds outside of family with friends or possible romantic partners so this may serve as a primary factor which may lead to insecurity. Additionally, for the anxious-ambivalents and avoidant respondents, we expect to find significant amounts of parasocial relationships being formed as a means to compensate for the lack of secure attachments among friends and peers outside of the family unit, with the collectivist nature of the society often hindering the expression of the authentic self, so media may provide an outlet of expression of the true self by allowing many to bond with media characters as substitutes. We use a wide sample of research as explored in our literature review from the United States and the West, as frames of reference for our results and discussion, namely: Bond & Calvert, 2014; Cohen, 2004; Cole Cohen, 1997, Cole & Leets, 1999; Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2015; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Rizzo, 2005; Rubin et al, 1985; Woodley & Movius, 2012.

### **Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1. The number of reported anxious-ambivalents and avoidants will be higher in the Kuwaiti sample than in the North American sample.

Hypothesis 2. The degree of parasocial relationships will be higher for anxious-ambivalent and avoidants in Kuwait than reported in the North American sample.

## **3. METHOD**

### *i. Participants*

We collected data from 259 undergraduate students at a private English-language university in Kuwait. About 40% of respondents were males and the rest were 60% females, and about 90% of all respondents were aged 18-23. About 71% of respondents were single, 23% were in a relationship, and only 6% reported being married. With regards to nationality, about 70% of all respondents were Kuwaiti nationals, and the rest were non-nationals.

### *ii. Procedure*

Before we distributed our surveys we first pretested by randomly distributing 100 surveys to students and we found no problems with responses. We then made use of research assistants and faculty to distribute the survey at the same private English undergraduate university in Kuwait. The sample consisted of undergraduates, and the anonymous survey was randomly disseminated in classrooms in freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior level courses. We first distributed the parasocial study followed by the attachment survey. The surveys were anonymous as participants were instructed not to fill in any information including their names that would identify them but were asked to fill out standard demographic questions such as age, nationality and gender. Participants were given up to 20 minutes to complete each survey.

*iii. Questionnaire Construction*

To test our hypotheses, we use a survey methodology. We used similar survey items employed by Auter (1992) and Rubin et al. (1985) Table 1 and Feeney and Noller (1992) Table 2. The questions on the parasocial scale (Table 1.) solicit information regarding the nature of a TV viewer’s attachment to their favorite TV star and the second survey (Table 2) asked questions to discern attachment style identifying the three types described in our literature review. The 21 items on the parasocial scale ascertained if a parasocial relationship exists and the depth of the parasocial relationship. Samples items include: “My favorite TV star makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend,” “I idolize/look up to my favorite TV star,” and “I like to compare my ideas with what my favorite TV star says.” For the attachment survey we employed a 20-item scale, which measures levels of attachment, namely security versus insecurity; examples include, “My partner often wants me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being,” “I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would,” and “I often worry that my partner won’t want to stay with me.” Our objective was to compare our results to research done in the western world as described in our literature review (Cohen, 2004; Cohen, 1997, Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Rubin et al., 1985) while using the methodology in Cole & Leets (1999) as a principal guide because the authors in the latter study tested the relationship between parasocial relationships and attachment styles specifically in their research. We did not add or change questions in either survey because the surveys were culturally neutral and can be applied to Kuwait because questions were not western-specific.

*iv. Parasocial Interaction*

In their seminal research Rubin et al. (1985) employed parasocial interaction scale, which was used to gauge the respondents bond with their favorite TV star (Auter, 1992). The scale that was used consisted of 20-items. We replaced 'newscaster' used in the original survey from Auter and followed the scale variation employed by Cole and Leets (1999), which just used the term 'TV personality'. In line with Cole and Leets (1999), we utilized an open-ended question asking participants to identify their favorite TV personality (Q.21). The items in our scale were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represented strongly disagree and 5 represented strongly agree. The unidimensional scale displayed similar reliability in both cultures collectivist and individualistic (see Table 1.).

*Table 1. Parasocial Interaction Scale Items (adapted from Auter, 1992; Rubin et al., 1985)*

	Unidimensional Factor Loading
7. My favorite TV star (person) makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.	0.658
11. I look forward to watching my favorite TV star's show.	0.647
5. When I'm watching my favorite TV star (person), I feel as if I am part of the group.	0.633
12. If my favorite TV star (person) appeared on another television program, I would watch the program.	0.623
10. Watching my favorite TV star (person) makes me feel less lonely.	0.599
15. If there were a story about my favorite TV star (person) in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.	0.547
17. I would like to meet my favorite TV star in person.	0.545
19. I find my favorite TV star (person) to be attractive.	0.535
13. My favorite TV star (person) and I seem to have a lot in common.	0.531
20. I am not as satisfied when other characters replace or overshadow my favorite TV star (person).	0.52
21. I idolize/look up to my favorite TV star (person)	0.519
6. I like to compare my ideas with what my favorite TV star (person) says.	0.509

Table 1. Parasocial Interaction Scale Items (adapted from Auer, 1992; Rubin et al., 1985)  
(Cont.)

18.	I think my favorite TV star (person) is like an old friend.	0.508
16.	I miss seeing my favorite TV star (person) when his or her program is no longer on TV.	0.506
9.	I like hearing the voice of my favorite TV star (person) in my home.	0.503
3.	When my favorite TV star (person) shows me how he or she feels about some issue, it helps me make up my own mind about the issue.	0.476
8.	I see my favorite TV star (person) as a real, down-to-earth person.	0.452
4.	I feel sorry for my favorite TV star (person) when he or she makes a mistake.	0.443
1.	I get a true understanding of my favorite TV star (person) when I see them on TV	0.380
2.	When my favorite TV star (person) jokes around with other people it makes the program easier to watch.	0.393
14.	I sometimes make remarks to my favorite TV star (person) when he or she makes a mistake.	0.264

#### v. Attachment interaction

We follow the approach adopted by Feeney and Noller (1992) and validate a three factor model for our Attachment Scale, using SPSS. Conceptually, the items that loaded on *Anxious-ambivalent* revolved around intimacy, love and dependence. The items that loaded on *Secure* invoked display and comfort in trusting and getting close to others. While items related to discomfort, dependency and abandonment loaded on the third factor of *Avoidant*. The factor loadings were in line with the findings in the Cole and Leets (1999) study as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Attachment Styles Factor Loadings Attachment style scale items  
(Feeney & Noller, 1992)

Items	Factor 1 Anxious Ambivalent	Factor 2 Secure	Factor 3 Avoidant	
2	Sometimes people are scared away by my wanting to be too close to them.	<b>0.552</b>	-0.171	-0.020
3	My partner often wants me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.	<b>0.585</b>	-0.160	0.115
13	I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.	<b>0.663</b>	-0.207	-0.217
14	I want to merge completely with another person.	<b>0.635</b>	0.127	-0.140
5	I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would.	<b>0.647</b>	-0.159	-0.096
6	I often worry that my partner won't want to stay with me.	<b>0.725</b>	-0.250	-0.079
4	I am nervous when anyone gets too close.	0.469	<b>-0.525</b>	0.006
8	I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.	0.465	<b>-0.493</b>	0.048
9	I find it relatively easy to get close to others.	0.406	<b>0.589</b>	0.198
10	I find it easy to trust others	0.471	<b>0.473</b>	-0.324
11	I feel comfortable depending on other people.	0.414	<b>0.470</b>	-0.444
12	I don't often worry about someone getting too close to me.	0.352	<b>0.565</b>	0.063
15	I often don't worry about being abandoned.	0.210	0.339	<b>0.503</b>
1	I find it difficult to depend on others.	0.295	-0.225	<b>0.624</b>
7.	I feel comfortable having other people depend on me.	0.442	0.325	<b>0.488</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results were in line with our expectations where those who had secure attachment were found to be involved in weaker parasocial relationships ( $R = 0.147$ ). The correlation between PSR and avoidant was 0.373. While the correlation between PSR and Anxious-Ambivalent was much higher at 0.406. The test for differences in correlations coefficients indicates that the correlations are indeed significantly different at alpha of 0.05. We used factor analysis to assess the reliability and explore the dimensionality of the 21-item parasocial scale. The results summarized in Table 1 show that all items load well on a single factor and capturing 43.7% of the total variance, hence there was no need to eliminate any of items.

We use Pearson Correlation to determine the degree and nature of association between PSRs and the three attachment styles in our sample (Table 1). We note that all correlation coefficients were statically significant at alpha of 0.05. More specifically, we theorized that the number of reported anxious-ambivalents and avoidants would be higher in the Kuwaiti sample than that in the North American studies found in the literature review and that the degree of parasocial relationships would be higher for anxious-ambivalents and avoidants in Kuwait than reported in the North American sample employed by Cole & Leets (1999). Through our study, we sought to expand the understanding of the relationships between parasocial relations and attachments in collectivist societies by focusing on Kuwait.

Overall, our results show that Kuwaitis and Kuwaiti residents form strong parasocial relationships. In general, our results were stronger than those reported in previous studies conducted in North America (Bond & Calvert, 2014; Cohen, 2004; Cohen, 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999); Dibble et al., 2015; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Rubin et al., 1985; Woodley & Movius 2012) indicating that Kuwaitis and those living in Kuwait maybe turning to relatively stable TV characters as a means of satisfying their unrealistic and often unmet relational needs. The issue of gender segregation may also play a role. Gender segregation at many places (universities, places of worship, etc.) keeps the interaction between the two sexes at a minimum. As a result, inherent needs of love and friendship are difficult to satisfy in an environment that considers dating against societal norms and traditions. Turning to television idols creates a strong bond of intimacy, which would be difficult to feel in a traditional culture like Kuwait.

Furthermore, and as is the case for the Cole and Leets (1999) study, it was found that a person's willingness to form a parasocial bond with his or her favorite TV personality is related to his/her attachment type. There were statistical differences between the parasocial relationships of those who were secure, avoidant or anxious-ambivalent. It is possible that the parasocial bonds these individuals form with media figures simply reflects another manifestation of their desire for intimacy and the fulfillment of missing needs. In particular, we found a higher percentage of avoidants and anxious-ambivalents in our sample, and in return higher levels of insecure type parasocial relationships, with the latter group exhibiting the highest level of parasocial types of ties.

The percentage of those involved in insecure type relationships was 42.6% in the Cole and Leets (1999) study, that percentage in our study was 47.6%. The difference between the two was nearing significance and is in the direction expected, whereby the insecure-type attachment will be more prevalent in the collectivist setting as stipulated in Hypothesis 1.

What was also significant in this study is that those who classified as avoidants also seemed to have significant parasocial relationships in keeping with our hypotheses. This is counter to the findings of the Cole and Leets' (1999) study. It could be that being in a

collectivist society where belonging to a group and forming strong ties are the norm, avoidants may have a higher tendency to seek “refuge” in a mediated bond.

Another difference between our results and those of Cole and Leets (1999) is that we found stronger correlations amongst the three types of attachment and PSRs. In this study, the highest correlation is for anxious-ambivalent, the second highest is for avoidants and the smallest is the secure type attachment. These results reinforce our hypotheses where we theorized that a high amount of avoidants and anxious-ambivalents would be found in our sample and that these two groups would both form the strongest parasocial bonds (See Table 3.).

*Table 3. Correlation between Attachment Styles and Parasocial Relationship*

	<b>Cole &amp; Leets’ Study: Percentage respondents in each category &amp; Correlation strength ranks N=159</b>	<b>Our Study: Percentage respondents in each category N=263</b>	<b>Our study: Correlations with PSRs &amp; p-values N=263</b>
<b>1. PSR</b>			1.0
<b>2. Secure</b>	57.4% (2)	52.5%	0.147* p = 0.07
<b>3. Avoidant</b>	24.3% (3)	27.3%	0.373*** p = 0.00
<b>4. Anxious</b>	18.3% (1)	20.2%	0.406*** p = 0.00

As Table 3 shows, the numbers of those belonging to the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant categories are higher than those reported in the Cole and Leets (1999) study. Hypothesis 2 is also supported as the correlations of PSR in the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant groups in Kuwait are higher than those reported in the Cole and Leets (1999) study.

Hypothesis 2 speaks to the degree of parasocial relationships and argues that this will be higher for anxious-ambivalent and avoidants. This is also supported as shown in Table 3. Another fascinating finding in the Kuwaiti sample was that the absolute majority of respondents (92 percent) reported having formed PSRs. It is plausible that maintaining such relationships is an expression of an inner-self that is kept hidden and is not allowed to be revealed in the society. In a conservative collectivist society, parasocial relationships may offer an outlet to engage in ties that may be more in line with one’s inner or authentic self. Consequently, TV personalities may provide outlets for escape for viewers in the same way romance novels provide a fantasy world for women who are committed to reading them (Radway, 1991).

Our study has a number of limitations that should be outlined: First, our sample is limited to undergraduate students and as such is biased towards younger respondents. Cross-cultural researchers have identified age as an important variable that affects one’s tendency to internalize the norms and values of the society and behave in a way that is in line with societal expectations (Triandis, 1995). Nonetheless, the Cole and Leets (1999) study also used university students as respondents.

The majority of the students in the Kuwaiti sample belong to affluent families, with multiple, nannies, drivers, and maids in each household. As described in the theory section, maids tend to assume many of the roles traditionally assigned to the mother. This phenomenon could be explored in future studies.

A related limitation is that the more affluent families tend to have access to a wide variety of media and foreign programming. As the children grow-up in a westernized

environment where English may be widely spoken at home, they would be more likely to follow Western shows and programs.

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