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*Linking reality TV to materialism, entitlement, and narcissism*

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# Generation Me in the Spotlight: Linking Reality TV to Materialism, Entitlement, and Narcissism

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Today's youth, the Generation Me, is deemed materialistic, entitled, and narcissistic. Individuality has become an important value in child-rearing and is cultivated in the media—especially within the reality TV genre. The aim of this study was to investigate whether adolescents' and emerging adults' preference for MTV reality shows fosters materialism, entitlement, and narcissism. To this end, an online questionnaire on television use, possessions, and happiness was administered to a sample of 527 15- to 21-year-olds. Our findings indicate that the more reality TV adolescents view, the more materialistic, entitled, and narcissistic they are. No such patterns were found for emerging adults. We presume adolescents' idolization of reality TV celebrities may cause them to

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mimic their behaviors. Future research should indicate whether teaching adolescents about the scripts in reality TV decreases worship of reality TV celebrities and, subsequently, reality TV's effect on adolescents' beliefs and values.

In 2006, Dr. Jean Twenge first published her seminal book on the Generation Me, describing those born in the late 1980s and 1990s. Despite the label—like many others before—being highly contested due to its simplistic and generalizing nature (Arnett, 2013; Roberts, Edmonds, & Grijalva, 2010; Trzeniewski & Donnellan, 2010), many do perceive today's youth as extremely self-focused. Although contemporary child-rearing is meant to be autonomy supportive, it may condemn authority. Parents wish to take their child's feelings and perspective into account while making decisions but are said to be at risk of providing too much freedom and too little guidance (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Presumably, children are “taught to be driven by individual needs and desires,” “follow their dreams,” and “pursue happiness above all else” (Twenge, 2006, p. 19). Even scholars who dispute the Generation Me label characterize today's youth by their individualized belief systems (Arnett, 2015).

In addition to being stimulated by parents, individuality is glorified in the popular media. The Generation Me can be split into two age groups: adolescents and emerging adults. Both groups spend more time engaged with media than with any other activity—including sleep. Adolescents are estimated to use media up to 11 hours a day, and emerging adults up to 12 (Alloy Media & Marketing, 2009; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). Although media preferences vary by sex, age, education, and socioeconomic status (SES) (Roe, 2000), adolescents and emerging adults share a common interest, namely, emotionally intense entertainment experiences (Bartsch, 2012). Hence, it may come as no surprise that both groups favor reality TV (Nielsen, 2009). It is important to note that this genre is perceived as the so-called superspreader of materialism, entitlement, and narcissism (Twenge, 2006).

Reality TV has been defined as a “catch-all category for a variety of different one-off programmes, series, and formats that follow real people and their everyday or out of the ordinary experiences” (Hill, Weibull, & Nilsson, 2007, p. 18). MTV was one of the first network stations to pick up on the genre with *The Real World*, a show that remains one of the longest running reality series in television history. Since the show's launch in 1992, MTV has produced 31 seasons. In recent years, MTV expanded its reality TV programming with shows like *Jersey Shore* and *Geordie Shore*. Of all the reality shows available, the MTV shows are the most popular among the youth audience (Franko & Krieger, 2011).

Despite their liking the reality TV genre, young people perceive it to be “socially undesirable”—disseminating questionable values among peers (Leone, Chapman Peek, & Bissell, 2006). As stated before, they are not alone in this. Critical thoughts

on reality TV can be traced all over the Internet. In 2011, the *Huffington Post* published an article stating that

reality TV has made the Seven Deadly Sins—pride, avarice, envy, wrath, list, gluttony, and sloth—attributes to be admired. Throw in selfishness, deceit, spite, and vengeance . . . and you have the personification of the worst kind of person on Earth. (Taylor, 2011, para. 2)

Given the aforementioned critique, the first aim of this study is to examine whether reality TV fosters youth's materialism, entitlement, and narcissism.

Our study builds on the insights of Gerbner and Gross's (1976) cultivation theory and is inspired by Valkenburg and Peter's (2013) differential susceptibility to media effects model. Cultivation theory can be used to explain why, *in general*, reality TV could affect materialism, entitlement, and narcissism. The differential susceptibility to media effects model can be used to predict who, *in particular*, are most vulnerable to these effects. Among other factors, vulnerability depends on developmental stage and tends to decrease with age (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). The second aim of this study is to examine whether the effect of reality TV on materialism, entitlement, and narcissism is stronger for adolescents than for emerging adults. If true, this could be reason to develop media literacy interventions on reality TV to increase adolescents' resilience.

## CULTIVATION

Cultivation theory was first introduced by Gerbner and Gross (1976) to explain why frequent exposure to television violence leads to increased fear of crime (i.e., the "mean world syndrome"; see McQuail, 2010). Its premise is that heavy viewers are more likely to accept the world as created by television as an accurate depiction of reality and to use it as a reference frame in their day-to-day life. Related to the previous example, this means that the more television violence viewers are exposed to, the more violent they perceive the world to be. They may even go as far as taking measures to decrease their risk of becoming a victim of crime. Hence, a person's media diet can be predictive of their attitudes and behaviors.

Within cultivation research, a distinction is made between first-order and second-order effects. First-order effects are memory-based judgments, whereas second-order effects are online or stimulus-based judgments (Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2011). When a certain judgment is called for, for instance, because a researcher asks you to give an estimate of crime rates, it can be either retrieved from memory or created in the moment. Memory-based judgments are judgments retrieved from memory (Hastie & Park, 1986). They can be based on fact (i.e., news items) and fiction (i.e., crime shows). These judgments can suffer from recall bias and accessibility

bias. Related to the preceding example, recall bias comes about when people remember the wrong fact figure (Hastie & Park, 1986). With accessibility bias, people mistake the ease with which they can recollect examples of crime as seen on television (i.e., fact and fiction) for an indicator of crime in real life (Shrum et al., 2011). As heavy viewers tend to have more examples of television crime stored in their memory, they are more prone to accessibility bias when making memory-based judgments.

Shrum and colleagues (2011) argued that, in practice, people form few memory-based judgments. Instead, we evaluate information spontaneously as we encounter it. For instance, when watching a crime show, viewers might ask themselves whether the portrayed crime could happen to them and whether they should take precautions. Online or stimulus-based judgments are formed in the moment. The thoughts that occupy our mind are determined by the distinctive features of the programs we watch, as well as our goal orientations. The more motivated we are to process certain information, for instance, because we want to be educated or entertained, the more likely it is we form online or stimulus-based judgments (Shrum et al., 2011). Whether these judgments are correct depends on our ability to process and properly deconstruct the information we are presented with (Shrum et al., 2011).

Cultivation effects of reality TV viewing on youth's materialism, entitlement, and narcissism are likely to be second-order effects, as youth not only show great interest in reality TV shows (Bartsch, 2012; Nielsen, 2009; Roe, 2000) but also have a clear goal orientation while watching these shows—either wanting to educate themselves on how to act in various types of relationships (i.e., friendships, romantic relationships) and what it means to be a “real” man or woman, or wanting to be entertained and beat boredom (Arnett, 1995; Coyne et al., 2013). However, despite their name, reality TV shows provide a distorted image of reality. Because adolescents and emerging adults are often unaware that “reality” TV shows are in fact scripted, they may not be able to scrutinize its content and pick up on questionable life lessons (Leone et al., 2006; Poniewozik, 2006).

One of the basic premises of cultivation theory is that the outcome variables of interest are subjective to change. Despite popular “essentialist” assumptions that our personality traits are fixed, personality consistency actually increases with age (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Estimates on the age at which personalities mature vary from 30 (McCrea & Costa, 1994) to 50 (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). Either way, the personalities of adolescents and emerging adults are still changing (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). In line with these general findings, previous scholars have detected age differences in materialism, entitlement, and narcissism. Materialism scores differ between children and adolescents (Chaplin & John, 2007) and fluctuate in adulthood, with peaks at younger and older age (Jaspers & Pieters, 2016). Entitlement and narcissism scores peak early and decrease throughout life (Carlson & Gjerde, 2009; Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003).

Our personalities and changes in personality are determined by a wide variety of factors. Traditionally, a distinction has been made between factors inspiring continuity

(i.e., genetics, expectations held by the social environment, and consistent and reinforcing feedback in social encounters) and factors inspiring change (i.e., age, biosocial transitions such as puberty and parenthood, and historical events such as war and depression; Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Actual change is either self-inflicted or imposed. We react to punishment and reward and learn from others through listening and observation (Caspi & Roberts, 2001, referencing *social learning theory* by Bandura, 1986). Like cultivation theory (e.g., Arnett, 1995), social learning theory has been previously applied in research into the effects of media on personality (Clark, Martin, & Bush, 2001). To understand why adolescents' and emerging adults' materialism, entitlement, and narcissism could be affected by reality TV viewing, it is essential to first consider the specific contents that characterize the genre.

### Materialism

Much of the aforementioned work by Shrum and colleagues describes how television viewing cultivates materialism (e.g., Burroughs, Shrum, & Rindfleisch, 2002; Shrum, 2004; Shrum, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2005). Dominant definitions of materialism emphasize that people's materialism rests on three dimensions: material centrality, the importance attached to owning and acquiring possessions; material happiness, the happiness anticipated with owning and acquiring possessions; and material success, the status anticipated with owning and acquiring new possessions (Richins, 2004). In general, the levels of wealth and happiness portrayed on television exceed well beyond those of your average Joe or Jane. By suggesting that wealth is commonplace and that it leads to happiness and status, television promotes all three dimensions of materialism (Harmon, 2001; Shrum et al., 2005; Shrum et al., 2011).

In comparison to other mainstream genres, the level of wealth and desired outcomes may be even more pronounced in reality TV. The reality TV genre focuses on the rich and famous (current examples on MTV include *My Super Sweet 16* and *MTV Cribs*) or on average people who are allowed to indulge themselves in an extravagant lifestyle (current examples include *The Valleys* and *Geordie Shore*). Even with shows like *Teen Mom*, in which the producers claim to depict normal life and make frequent references to the characters' financial struggles, viewers cannot help but wonder how they can afford their expensive wardrobes, cars, and houses ("Teen Mom," 2010). Given previous research we expect the following:

H1: Reality TV viewing is positively associated with youth's materialism.

### Entitlement

Entitlement can be defined in various ways. Within the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), the subdimension of entitlement is measured as ambitiousness, a need for power, dominance, hostility, and a lack of consideration and tolerance

for others (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Related to the Generation Me, it has been referred to as “the pervasive belief that one deserves special treatment, success, and more material things” (Twenge & Campbell, 2009, p. 230). Similarly, but more tangibly, Beutler and Gudmunson (2012) defined youth’s entitlement as

an attitude in which adolescents feel their parents are obligated to provide and pay for the things they want or believe they deserve. Entitlement encompasses adolescents’ beliefs that their parents’ financial resources automatically belong to them and their parents should pay for things they desire even if they are “extras.” (pp. 19–20)

Entitlement may be reinforced by reality TV because, as was just explained, it frequently entails regular people who have been given the opportunity to lead an improvident lifestyle (Hill, 2005). MTV airs multiple shows in which groups of normal youth are invited to live in spectacular accommodations and enjoy a party life in exchange for their working for a designated company. For the group in *Jersey Shore* this entailed working in a T-shirt store, the group of *Geordie Shore* organized “Tash on Tours” or gave spray tans, and the group in *Beauty School Cop Outs* were hair or make-up artists. These are not high-end jobs, yet the groups are given great rewards for their efforts—teaching youth that you don’t need to work hard in order to achieve high pay. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H2: Reality TV viewing is positively associated with youth’s entitlement.

Although this study is the first to examine the effect of media use on entitlement, there is a growing body of literature suggesting that media use predicts the closely related concepts of envy and jealousy (e.g., Chou & Edge, 2012; Fox & Moreland, 2015).

## Narcissism

Narcissism has previously been defined as “a grandiose yet fragile sense of self and entitlement as well as a preoccupation with success and demands for admiration” (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006, pp. 440–441). In empirical research it is traditionally measured with the NPI, which includes seven dimensions: authority, vanity, exhibitionism, exploitativeness, entitlement, self-sufficiency, and superiority (Ames et al., 2006). There are no content analyses that measure the display of the behaviors associated with these dimensions in reality TV programming, but Young and Pinsky (2006) investigated the extent to which reality TV celebrities show these behaviors in general.

Young and Pinsky (2006) found that reality TV celebrities score 27% higher on the NPI than the average U.S. citizen. Furthermore, they found indications that reality TV celebrities score particularly high on authority, vanity, and exploitativeness. These

subdimensions of narcissism are indicative, respectively, of dominance, assertiveness, and self-confidence; judging oneself as attractive or being perceived as attractive; and rebelliousness, nonconformity, and a lack of consideration and tolerance for others (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Given that reality TV celebrities display their narcissistic nature and that their behaviors may be actually exaggerated by personal choice (i.e., to increase attention for their persona) or director cuts (i.e., to increase a show's entertainment value; Hearn, 2006), it is likely that reality TV reflects the image that many people in society are narcissistic and that this is okay. Hence, based on cultivation theory, we would expect the following:

H3: Reality TV viewing is positively associated with youth's narcissism.

Previous research on the relationship between media and narcissism mainly focused on social network site use (e.g., Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, & Fearington, 2014; Walters & Horton, 2015). In these studies, narcissism was found to predict and be affected by media use. Within the specific field of cultural studies, however, narcissism is perceived merely a product of current-day society (e.g., Malikhao & Servaes, 2011; Tyler, 2007).

### Age-Related Differences

Both adolescents and emerging adults like reality TV because of the emotionally intense entertainment experience it provides (Bartsch, 2012). Yet, of importance, youth may also like reality shows because of the opportunity for social learning, allowing them "to vicariously experience a real world through observations of others' trials and tribulations" (Godlewski & Perse, 2010, p. 151). Both adolescence and emerging adulthood are periods of identity exploration, in which youth are trying to establish their values, abilities, and hopes for the future. Previous studies have indicated that youth use media to form ideals about gender, relationships, family, work, and politics (Arnett, 1995; Coyne et al., 2013).

Youth admire celebrities and mimic their behaviors (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Giles & Maltby, 2004). The stronger a viewer relates to a celebrity, the bigger the celebrity's influence (Basil, 1996). Because of the proximity in age (Cohen, 2001), it is likely that both adolescents and emerging adults identify with the casts of the MTV reality shows. However, as idolization decreases with age (Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Ben-Horin, 1996), the people in these casts are likely to have a bigger influence on adolescents than emerging adults. Because other scholars have also found evidence that youth's susceptibility to media decreases with age (Coyne et al., 2013), the following may be expected:

H4: The positive association between reality TV viewing and materialism is stronger for adolescents than for emerging adults.



- H5: The positive association between reality TV viewing and entitlement is stronger for adolescents than for emerging adults.
- H6: The positive association between reality TV viewing and narcissism is stronger for adolescents than for emerging adults.

## METHOD

### Participants

To test our assumptions, an online questionnaire was administered to 527 Dutch adolescents and emerging adults (264 adolescents ages 15–17 years, 55% female; 263 emerging adults ages 18–21 years; 56% female). NovioData, an international research agency with profound experience in scientific collaborations and studying adolescents and emerging adults (see [noviodata.com/panels/children-and-young-people/](http://noviodata.com/panels/children-and-young-people/)), was responsible for collecting the data. Participants were recruited through an online panel representative of the Netherlands with regard to age, sex, and geographical distribution. The participants were informed that the survey was about television viewing, belongings, and happiness and that they could end their participation at any time. The questionnaire took about 10 minutes to complete, and each participant was awarded 50 Euro cents worth of credit points in the company's reward system. Prior to the implementation of the study, informed consent was obtained from the participants and, if the participants were younger than 18, from their parents. The study was granted Institutional Review Board approval by the university's ethical committee.

### Measures

The survey measured participants' reality TV viewing, overall TV viewing, materialism, entitlement, narcissism, and a series of covariates. Overall TV viewing was included to disentangle the effect of the reality TV viewing from that of overall TV consumption. All items for all assessments in the questionnaire were in Dutch. Next we describe each of our measures and provide their means and standard deviations for adolescents and emerging adults separately. For each measure we present the outcomes of an independent samples *t* test. This test indicates whether the mean score of the adolescents differs from the mean score of the emerging adults.

*Reality TV Viewing.* To assess reality TV viewing, we asked the participants to indicate how frequently they watched specific MTV reality TV shows that were aired on Dutch television at the time the study was

conducted. Response categories ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). By browsing the programs of the Dutch MTV channel, we identified eight TV shows that reflected our definition of reality TV: *Are You the One?*, *Beauty School Cop Outs*, *Big Tips Texas*, *Ex on the Beach*, *Geordie Shore*, *MTV Cribs*, *The Valleys*, and *Snooki & Jwoww*. The scores on the eight items were summed to form a total score of reality TV viewing, and descriptive statistics were calculated for adolescents ( $M = 13.05$ ,  $SD = 6.32$ ) and emerging adults ( $M = 11.80$ ,  $SD = 5.04$ ). A  $t$  test shows that adolescents watched reality TV significantly more often than emerging adults,  $t(525) = 2.51$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Overall TV Viewing.** To measure overall TV viewing, we adapted the instrument by Lee, Hornik, and Hennessy (2008). First, we asked participants on how many days during the week they watch TV and how much time they spend on TV viewing on such a day. The response scale for the first item ranged from 0 to 5 days. The second item was an open-ended question that was answered by filling in the number of hours and minutes spent on TV viewing per day. TV viewing during the weekend was assessed with a similar pair of items. Participants were asked on how many days they watch TV during the weekend and how much time they spend on TV viewing per day. The response scale of the first item ranged from 0 to 2 days, and the second item was again an open-ended question, answered by filling in hours and minutes. By multiplying the number of days with the time spent on TV per day, a score for TV viewing during the week and a score for TV viewing during the weekend were calculated. The two scores were combined to calculate a composite score for weekly TV viewing in minutes. Descriptive statistics indicated that, on average, adolescents ( $M = 946.76$ ,  $SD = 546.06$ ) spent more time watching television than emerging adults ( $M = 844.72$ ,  $SD = 674.14$ ). This difference is marginally significant,  $t(525) = 1.91$ ,  $p = .06$ .

**Materialism.** Materialism was measured with the short version of the Material Values Scale for Children (Opree, Buijzen, van Reijmersdal, & Valkenburg, 2011). The short version includes six items (e.g., “Do you think it’s important to own expensive things?”), with response categories ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The items form a reliable measure ( $\alpha_{\text{adolescents}} = .93$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{adults}} = .88$ ). A mean index for materialism was formed ( $M_{\text{adolescents}} = 2.24$ ,  $SD_{\text{adolescents}} = .97$ ;  $M_{\text{adults}} = 2.02$ ,  $SD_{\text{adults}} = .75$ ). Adolescents were more materialistic than emerging adults,  $t(525) = 2.87$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Entitlement.** To measure entitlement, we used the Money Attitudes Scale developed by Beutler and Gudmunson (2012). This scale was originally developed to assess entitlement in adolescents and has been validated in a

sample of high school students. The scale includes six items (e.g., “I feel it is my parents’ job to pay for my everyday needs”). The response categories range from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The items form a reliable measure ( $\alpha_{\text{adolescents}} = .82$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{adults}} = .81$ ). A mean index for feeling of entitlement was formed ( $M_{\text{adolescents}} = 3.13$ ,  $SD_{\text{adolescents}} = .72$ ;  $M_{\text{adults}} = 2.31$ ,  $SD_{\text{adults}} = .73$ ). Adolescents felt more entitled than emerging adults,  $t(525) = 12.74$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Narcissism.** To measure narcissism, we used the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16). The NPI-16 is a one-dimensional measure of narcissism that is based on the NPI-40, which is the most widespread scale used in nonclinical research. The scale has been validated in undergraduate student samples (Ames et al., 2006). It includes 16 pairs of items, each pair consisting of an item indicating high narcissism and an item indicating low narcissism. For instance, one pair includes the items “Everybody likes to hear my stories” and “Sometimes I tell good stories.” For each item pair, participants had to indicate which item better describes their personality. The instrument has an acceptable reliability ( $\alpha_{\text{adolescents}} = .74$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{adults}} = .69$ ). An index score for narcissism was formed by counting how many times participants chose the high narcissism item ( $M_{\text{adolescents}} = 4.06$ ,  $SD_{\text{adolescents}} = 3.07$ ;  $M_{\text{adults}} = 4.16$ ,  $SD_{\text{adults}} = 2.85$ ). There is no significant difference in narcissism between the two age groups,  $t(525) = -.41$ , *ns*.

**Covariates.** A series of covariates were measured because they may act as confounders in the relationship between reality TV viewing use and young people’s values or because they have been correlated with values (Foster et al., 2003; Roe, 2000). These were age ( $M = 17.72$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ), sex (56% female), educational level, and household SES. Educational level was measured by asking participants to indicate their highest educational level. The response categories range from 1 (*none or primary school*) to 8 (*master’s degree*) (1.3% primary education level, 57.5% secondary education level, 41.2% tertiary education level). Household SES was measured with the item “Thinking of the household you grew up in, did you household have less or more money to spend than the average household?” The response categories range from 1 (*much less*) to 10 (*much more*) ( $M = 6.15$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ).

## RESULTS

All hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling with AMOS 21 and maximum likelihood estimation. The model in Figure 1 was estimated for the full sample to test H1 to H3 and for adolescents and emerging adults separately to test H4 to H6. Model fit was assessed by inspecting the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root

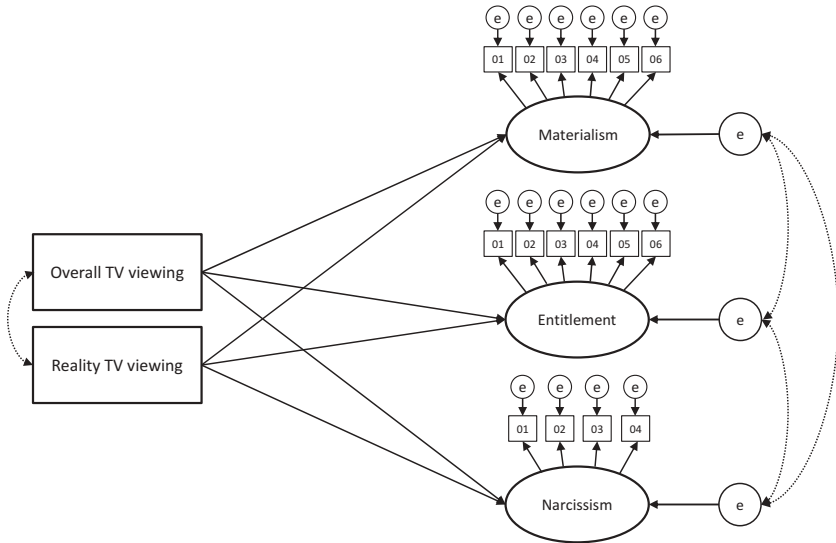


FIGURE 1 Structural equation model on the association between youth’s reality TV and overall TV viewing on materialism, entitlement, and narcissism. *Note.* Age, sex, educational level, and household socioeconomic status were entered as exogenous control variables but are not depicted in the figure.

mean square residual (SRMR). An acceptable model fit is indicated by a CFI larger than .90, a RMSEA smaller than .08, and a SRMR smaller than .10 (Byrne, 2010).

In all models, the score for reality TV viewing and the score for overall TV viewing were entered as independent (i.e., exogenous) variables. Materialism, entitlement, and narcissism were entered as dependent (i.e., endogenous) variables and modelled as latent factors. The materialism and the entitlement factor were both measured with six indicators. The 16 indicators for narcissism were summarized into four items parcels. The four parcels were constructed using the *factorial algorithm*. With this technique, indicators are allocated to parcels so that item-specific components are distributed evenly across parcels (Matsunaga, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Finally, several control variables were included in the model: age, sex, educational level, and household SES were entered as additional independent variables.

<sup>1</sup>This approach is based on first conducting a confirmatory factor analysis and then using the identified factor loadings as a criterion to assign indicators to parcels. Because the indicators for narcissism are dichotomous, the confirmatory factor analysis was conducted in Mplus using the robust weighted least squares estimator to account for the categorical nature of the indicators.

### Full Sample (H1, H2, and H3)

To test H1 through H3, we calculated a model for the full sample of adolescents and emerging adults (see Figure 1). Estimating the model revealed two problems. The model did not fit the data well,  $\chi^2(179, N = 527) = 845.28, p < .001$ ; CFI = .86, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .06. To solve this problem, we inspected modification indices (Byrne, 2010) and found that the main reason for low model fit was a missing correlation between the error terms of two indicators for materialism, which both tap into the idea that one prefers people who own a lot of things (i.e., “Do you like people who have expensive things more than you like other people?” and “Do you like people who have a lot of things more than you like other people?”). Thus, the two error terms were allowed to correlate. Second, inspecting the distributions of the model variables revealed that overall TV viewing was skewed (2.67) and had a very high kurtosis (19.26). In contrast, all other variables had an acceptable skewness (range =  $-0.65$  to  $1.45$ ) and kurtosis (range =  $-1.95$  to  $1.67$ ). Analyzing the overall TV viewing variable with a boxplot identified nine outliers with very high media use scores. These cases were excluded from all further analyses to reduce skewness and kurtosis.

Estimating and inspecting the modified model shows that our endeavors were successful. The new model has an acceptable fit:  $\chi^2(178, N = 518) = 571.26, p < .001$ ; CFI = .92, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .06. Furthermore, all variables have an acceptable skewness (range =  $-0.65$  to  $1.50$ ) and kurtosis (range =  $-1.95$  to  $1.92$ ). The effects of reality TV viewing, overall TV viewing, and the covariates are summarized in Table 1.

H1 predicts that reality TV viewing is positively associated with materialism. We find that higher levels of reality TV viewing are indeed associated with higher materialism ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ). This corroborates H1. We also find the predicted relationship between reality TV viewing and the feeling of entitlement. The more young people watch reality TV, the more entitled they feel ( $\beta = .15, p < .001$ ). Thus, H2 is also confirmed. H3 posits that reality TV viewing is positively associated with narcissism. The results support the hypothesis and show that there exists indeed a positive relationship ( $\beta = .16, p < .01$ ).

### Multigroup Analysis (H4, H5, and H6)

To test H4 through H6, which posit that effects of reality TV viewing are stronger for adolescents than for emerging adults, we conducted a multigroup analysis. That is, we calculated a model that provides separate estimates of all model parameters for adolescents and emerging adults and compared the path coefficients. Of importance, such a comparison requires full or at least partial metric invariance of the measurement models (for a detailed discussion, see

TABLE 1  
Effects of Reality TV Viewing, Overall TV Viewing, and Covariates on Materialism, Entitlement, and Narcissism

	Model 1: Full Sample <sup>a</sup>	Model 2	
		Adolescents <sup>b</sup>	Emerging Adults <sup>c</sup>
<b>Materialism</b>			
Age	-.02	-.03	.00
Sex	-.13**	-.13*	-.14*
Educational level	-.10 <sup>†</sup>	-.05	-.11
Household SES	.19***	.22***	.17**
Reality TV viewing	.18***	.21**	.12 <sup>†</sup>
Overall TV viewing	.11*	.19**	.04
<b>Entitlement</b>			
Age	-.40***	-.08	-.17*
Sex	-.12**	-.17*	-.11
Educational LEVEL	-.12*	-.19**	-.04
Household SES	.05	-.00	.09
Reality TV viewing	.15***	.18**	.13 <sup>†</sup>
Overall TV viewing	.07 <sup>†</sup>	.01	.14*
<b>Narcissism</b>			
Age	-.06	-.10	.06
Sex	-.15**	-.18*	-.11
Educational level	.17*	.18*	.11
Household SES	.03	-.03	.11
Reality TV viewing	.16**	.23**	.09
Overall TV viewing	-.03	.02	-.09

Note. Standardized path coefficients are depicted. SES = socioeconomic status.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 518. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 260. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 258.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001. <sup>†</sup>*p* < .10.

Kühne, 2013). We tested this assumption and found that a partial invariance model has an acceptable fit to the data:  $\chi^2(365, N = 518) = 749.76, p < .001$ ; CFI = .91, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06.<sup>2</sup> The effects of reality TV viewing, overall TV viewing, and the covariates are summarized in Table 1.

<sup>2</sup>More precisely, full metric invariance exists when like indicators have the same loading in each group that is compared. However, some researchers have pointed out that this assumption is too restrictive and that comparisons of path coefficients across groups are admissible even when some indicators are not invariant (i.e., when a model is partially invariant; Byrne, Shavelson, & Muthén, 1989). Nested model comparisons showed that a full metric invariance model does not fit our data,  $\chi^2(13) = 36.77, p < .001$ , but that a partial invariance model does,  $\chi^2(9) = 12.55, p = .18$ . The model is not fully invariant because four indicators of entitlement have different loadings across the groups.

H4 posits that the relationship between reality TV viewing and materialism is stronger for adolescents than for emerging adults. We find evidence in line with this assumption. There is a significant relationship between reality TV viewing and materialism for adolescents ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ), whereas the association is only marginally significant for emerging adults ( $\beta = .12, p < .10$ ). H5 posits that reality TV viewing has a stronger positive association with the feeling of entitlement for adolescents than for emerging adults. There is also evidence for this hypothesis. The association is indeed stronger for adolescents ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ) than for emerging adults ( $\beta = .13, p < .10$ ). Finally, H6 predicts that the association between reality TV viewing and narcissism is stronger for adolescents than for emerging adults. This assumption is corroborated. Reality TV viewing is significantly associated with adolescents' narcissism ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ) but not with emerging adults' narcissism ( $\beta = .09, ns$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate whether the Generation Me, consisting of adolescents and emerging adults born in the 1980s and 1990s, are negatively affected by reality TV. Reality TV is believed to glorify individualism and, by its content, promote a higher standard of living (Twenge, 2006). Casts are assumed to set a bad example for young people, teaching them to be materialistic and narcissistic and to feel entitled to possessions or money they have not "earned." Because adolescents tend to idolize celebrities more than emerging adults (Raviv et al., 1996), we believed that the former would be more strongly influenced by reality TV than the latter. From the research presented in this article it may be derived that the association between reality TV viewing and materialism, entitlement, and narcissism is weak and that this association may be observed for adolescents but not for emerging adults. The implications of these conclusions are addressed next, followed by the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

### Theoretical Implications and Limitations

There are three possible explanations for why the observed association between reality TV viewing, on one hand, and materialism, entitlement, and narcissism, on the other hand, is weak. First, assuming that accumulative exposure could result in accumulative effects, the effects of reality TV viewing may be small in the short run and grow into medium or large effects over time (Slater, 2007, 2014). Second, the relation between reality TV viewing and materialism, entitlement, and narcissism may be transactional, with reality TV viewing being not only a predictor but also an outcome variable (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). In that case, reality TV-induced materialism, entitlement, and narcissism could in turn

increase reality TV viewing, leading to a reinforcing spiral (Slater, 2007, 2014). An important limitation to the current study is its cross-sectional nature, which does not allow for tests of causality. As explained, the effect of reality TV viewing on youth's materialism, entitlement, and narcissism could have been underestimated (assuming it will increase over time). However, it could also have been overestimated. If materialistic, entitled, and narcissistic youth indeed seek out reality content, then part of the association between reality TV and personality traits is explained by selective exposure. In that case, the effect of reality TV is actually smaller than estimated. Future studies should employ a longitudinal design in order to test these first two explanations.

The third explanation for the weak association between reality TV viewing and materialism, entitlement, and narcissism is that its content may resonate more with certain youth subpopulations. In 1969, Gerbner (as cited in Potter, 2014) distinguished three phases in cultivation analysis: first, the institutional analysis, which focuses on systematic variations in public message content; second, the message system analysis, which focuses on patterns of meaning across the media landscape; and third, the actual cultivation analysis, in which researchers study the extent to which certain content influences the public. We may conclude that reality TV has a high potential to influence youth, because the genre has become widely spread and because many reality TV shows—if not all—display materialistic, entitled, and narcissistic behavior (Pozner, 2010; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). However, an important limitation of the current study is its sole focus on the third phase in cultivation analysis: It does not control either for the actual portrayal of materialistic, entitled, and narcissistic behaviors or for audiences' perceptions of these behaviors. By employing exposure measures, which are more content specific (see Slater, 2004), future research could unravel differences in effects between shows and subgenres.

### Additional Suggestions for Future Research

According to the differential susceptibility to media effects model, youth differ in their susceptibility to media influences (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Adolescents' and emerging adults' vulnerability to reality TV effects may depend on their dispositional, development, and social susceptibility. Each susceptibility factor may moderate the effects of reality TV (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Dispositional susceptibility is determined by relatively stable factors such as personality and temperament but also by preexisting but unstable values and beliefs (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Of importance, rather than creating new assumptions, television content strengthens existing assumptions (Shrum, 2007). In other words, those who already are materialistic, entitled, and/or narcissistic may be influenced by reality TV viewing most. This is an assumption that could be tested in longitudinal research.



Developmental susceptibility is determined by cognitive, emotional, and social development (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Generally, susceptibility tends to decrease with age (Coyne et al., 2013). This was confirmed by our findings. The difference between the effects of reality TV on adolescents and on emerging adults gives ground to questions addressing the origin of this discrepancy. As explained in the age-related differences, reality TV is believed to have a stronger effect on adolescents because they tend to idolize and imitate celebrities more than emerging adults do (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Giles & Maltby, 2004). Yet, as social comparison theory presumes, comparison to media models can be both upward and downward (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). Where upward comparison explains why adolescents mimic their idols, downward comparison could explain why emerging adults do not. Perhaps they are less impressed by what they see, perceiving either reality TV as “unreal” or the depicted behaviors as undesirable (Leone et al., 2006). Hence, future research could investigate whether perceived reality and (dis)approval of depicted behaviors differ between adolescents and emerging adults and whether they function as moderators of the relationship between reality TV and materialism, entitlement, and narcissism.

Social susceptibility is determined by the social context, that is, family and friends (microlevel), school and work (mesolevel), and/or societal norms and values (macrolevel; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). As discussed at the beginning of this article, many parents—unknowingly and unwillingly—stimulate materialism, entitlement, and narcissism (Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). By encouraging individualism, parents may reinforce the message of reality TV content. Many parents, though, may want to do the opposite and decrease their adolescent’s level of materialism, entitlement, and narcissism. Materialism and entitlement have been related to living beyond one’s means, debt, and increased stress in one’s daily life (Watson, 2007), and narcissism has been related to arrogance, bragging, and a disagreeable personality (Foster et al., 2003). The results of our study imply that increasing adolescents’ media literacy with regard to reality television could provide a concrete start. Although reality TV shows may appear “real,” they are, in fact, in the least partially, scripted to increase a show’s entertainment value (Poniewozik, 2006). Presenting youth with clips that exemplify this practice might pull celebrities down from their pedestals, thereby reducing reality TV’s exemplary function. Given the negative consequences associated with materialism, entitlement, and narcissism, future research should explore whether media literacy interventions can indeed reduce adolescents’ susceptibility to reality TV effects.

To conclude, the present study contributes to the current debate on the causes of youth’s materialism, entitlement, and narcissism. The findings suggest that reality TV viewing is a factor that mainly affects adolescents’ but not emerging adults’ personality. Future research should focus on the psychological mechanisms that bring forward these effects, as well as the attenuating and reinforcing boundary conditions.

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