

INTRODUCTION

- Existential isolation refers to the subjective feeling that one's inner experiences are fundamentally not understood by others (Pinel et al., 2017).
- Individuals who experience high existential isolation often perceive interpersonal interactions as lacking depth or authenticity, which may lead them to seek alternative sources of connection.
- Parasocial relationships may fulfill this need by creating an illusion of intimacy and understanding with media figures
- Horton and Wohl (1956) originally described parasocial interaction as a face-to-face-like relationship in which audiences feel personally addressed and psychologically connected to media personas. Over time, repeated exposure to a media figure's thoughts, emotions, and personal disclosures can foster perceived intimacy, which resembles the closeness experienced in real interpersonal relationships (Derrick et al., 2009; Tukachinsky, 2011).
- Additionally, research suggests that perceived similarity and identification strengthen parasocial bonds and increase feelings of connection to media figures (Cohen, 2004; Tukachinsky, 2011).
- When individuals feel that a media figure shares their personality traits, beliefs, or emotional experiences, they may experience greater psychological closeness and validation. This perceived alignment can help counter existential isolation by fostering the sense that another mind reflects or resonates with one's internal experiences.
- Taken together, this literature suggests that stronger parasocial relationships may be negatively correlated with existential isolation.

Hypothesis:

- Individuals with stronger parasocial relationships will report lower existential isolation than those with weaker parasocial relationships.

METHOD

Procedure:

- Undergraduate students from the University of Florida and Texas Christian University ($N = 101$)
- The study used a remote, correlational design based on a self-report survey.

Measures:

- Existential Isolation (EIS; Pinel et al., 2017)
- "Other people usually do not understand my experiences."
- Loneliness (Russell et al., 1978)
- "How often do you feel that you lack companionship?"
- Celebrity Worship Scale (Maltby et al., 2006)
- "I am obsessed by details of My Favorite Celebrity's" life."
- Parasocial Interaction (Tsay & Bodine, 2012)
- "I see my favorite media personality or character as a close friend."
- Social Surrogacy Use Scale (Murray et al., 2025)
- "Over the past week, how often did you... Go on social media to post, comment, or interact with others."

RESULTS

Greater parasocial relationship strength was associated with lower existential isolation, indicating that individuals with stronger parasocial bonds reported feeling less existentially isolated.

| | | Correlations | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | 1. Existential Isolation | 2. Celebrity Worship | 3. Perceived Similarity | 4. Social Surrogacy Use |
| 1. Existential Isolation | Spearman Correlation | 1 | | | |
| 2. Celebrity Worship | Spearman Correlation | -.47*** | 1 | | |
| 3. Perceived Similarity | Spearman Correlation | -.42** | .36 | 1 | |
| 4. Social Surrogacy Use | Spearman Correlation | -.25 | .08 | .04 | 1 |

Note. ***indicates $p \leq .001$; **indicates $p \leq .05$



CONCLUSION

- The present study examined the association between parasocial relationship strength and existential isolation.
- Results indicated a significant negative correlation, such that individuals with stronger parasocial bonds reported lower levels of existential isolation.
- This finding suggests that parasocial relationships may be linked to reduced feelings of being fundamentally misunderstood by others.
- Media figures who share personal experiences, emotions, and perspectives may provide individuals with a sense of closeness and perceived understanding, which could help mitigate feelings of existential disconnection.

Limitations:

- The correlational nature of this study prevents conclusions about directionality or causality.
- It is possible that stronger parasocial bonds reduce existential isolation, but it is also possible that individuals who feel less existentially isolated are more able to form strong parasocial relationships.

Future Directions:

- Future research should use experimental or longitudinal designs to determine whether engaging with parasocial figures can causally reduce existential isolation over time.

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