

10 Things I Learned About Parasocial Relationships

10. Parasocial relationships are important for everyone to understand because of their future artificial intelligence implications.
9. Parasocial relationships were first theorized as the relationships that viewers have with television characters in the 1950s.
8. Parasocial relationships are now theorized to include all new media types. This includes new media characters as well as old media characters like novel protagonists, gods and politicians.
7. Parasocial relationships are necessarily asymmetrical. They are one-way relationships experienced as two-way.
6. In order to be a parasocial relationship- more than just passive viewing- the viewer must engage in schematic processing of information about the parasocial character. For example, the user must make predictions about what the character will do, or have expectations and explanations for the character's past and future behavior, or make attributions. So, the viewer must engage in this deeper type of schematic processing about the character's mind in order for a parasocial relationship to exist.
5. Parasocial relationships feel good and make everything better. They have social facilitation effects associated with them; things like you can perform better when you imagine the presence of your parasocial friend. Other types of social facilitation effects probably include pain reduction.
4. Originally thought to be for the lonely, actually parasocial relationships don't necessarily attract lonely people. They attract introverts more than extraverts. So, introverts tend to be more actively engaged in parasocial relationships because, you could say, parasocial relationships in a way are characterized by an introverted mode of relational interaction.
3. A good parasocial relationship makes you like real people more. Because you mis-attribute the source of your satisfaction. Parasocial relationships can increase your quality of life and these general good feelings make you like people more in general.
2. It's not uncommon for parasocial relationships to be more satisfying than real relationships. And if you ask why, then we can go back to the schematic processing. People are processing the minds and the information about the minds of their characters very deeply. And this can lead to a rich and satisfying relationship.
1. I think I see the problem with things like Alexa and Siri. The problem with these little new interactive robot things that are coming out is that it's hard to have a parasocial relationship with Alexa and Siri. Because we can't make schematic processing calls about their mind. I don't

know what their memories are. I don't know their predictions, their interpretation of current events or plans.

The problem is that the user tends to make those schematic processing calls about the programmer instead. "Oh, the programmer put this in here. The programmer is getting Siri to say this." So it's an interesting thing to think about in the future: the convergence of computing, parasocial relationships and how they will fit into the future of artificial intelligence.