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By [Rita Rubin](#)

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Study: Idol worship might be good for you

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Fess up. Have you ever joined a celebrity fan club? Do you grab a copy of *People* or *Us* whenever Julia or Brad are on the cover? That's not such a bad thing, especially if you're having a little trouble with your real-life interpersonal relationships,

researchers [report](#) in a journal called--what else?--*Personal Relationships*.

The University at Buffalo, State University of New York researchers base their conclusion on three studies, each involving around 100 undergraduate college students who took a standardized test to measure their level of self-esteem.

In the studies, participants were asked to write about their favorite same-sex celebrity (the researchers wanted to focus on celebrities the students admired, not ones they had a crush on, because that brings up different issues). They were also asked to describe their real selves and their ideal selves.

I just have to mention that for comparison purposes in two of the studies, some of the students were asked to write about [Regis Philbin](#) instead of their favorite celebrity. The researchers do not explain why Rege was selected as the "control" celebrity.

The study found that students with low self-esteem thought their favorite celebrity greatly resembled their ideal self. And after writing for several minutes about their favorite celebrity (as opposed to writing about Rege or writing about a close relationship partner), the low self-esteem people felt more like their ideal selves.

Psychologists call a connection with a celebrity you've never met a "parasocial relationship." Parasocial relationships can buffer you against real-life rejection, but not as much as real-life relationships can, the authors write. Parasocial relationships can complement real-life relationships but shouldn't replace them. In other words, the authors write, parasocial relationships are better than no relationship but not as good as the real thing. (Obviously, the research focused on undergraduates at a big Northeastern university. Whether the findings would apply to undergraduates elsewhere or to older or younger people

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isn't known.)

I think most people can think of a celebrity they particularly admire, a celebrity they like to follow in the news. Has such a parasocial relationship ever helped you deal with real-life relationship issues?

Photo by Mario Anzuoni, Reuters

Posted at 04:25 PM/ET, June 06, 2008 in Mental health, Watercooler | Permalink

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[gsxr600](#) wrote: 22h 53m ago

[slippersox](#) wrote: 2d 5h ago

does anyone else get sick of hearing about these people who do not even have real jobs? i mean, why not look up to people who actually earn respect like soldiers, teachers or even good parents??

COULDNT AGREE MORE!!!

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[h_nicole_young](#) wrote: 1d 18h ago

[MagEakaWebutante](#) wrote: 1d 1h ago

Yeah, that's whole purpose of celebrity. We are supposed to think they have ideal lives. There is a fine between admiration and idol worship. I admit to having a couple of those "Parasocial relationships especially when I younger.

Hey, Mag E! Nice to see you here in therapy with the rest of us! LOL!

For those who don't know, Mag E and I are both currently having one of these so called parasocial relationships with Marlee Matlin -- just go check out the comments to Marlee's blog here at USAToday.com... <http://tinyurl.com/54sw8n>

This is too funny. I know I tend to write LOL (laughing out loud) a lot when I am commenting, but I am literally laughing out loud right now over this.

And I disagree with the authors of this study that so-called parasocial relationships are not as good for you as a real relationship. This is a pure judgment call made by "expert" psychologists who really don't know anything for sure -- and seem to be especially adverse to saying, "We

don't know." (That's a great idea for a topic for the next therapy session, BTW -- experts who are so afraid to say, "I don't know" that they would rather give a wrong answer, and give thousands of people unnecessary complexes about themselves in the process, than say these three simple words).

The fact that these experts don't even take into account the bisexual nature of many celebrity crushes (i.e., it is probably more likely for same-sex "admirations", if any, to actually be just simple same-sex crushes, even among people who identify as heterosexuals) indicates just how sloppy the basic research was, much less the interpretation of the results. In fact, I am going to go out on a limb and say there is no such thing as a parasocial relationship, at least not as so strictly defined by these authors (i.e., they say it has to be with a same sex person and it can't be a crush). Instead, I say these celebrity relationships are mostly just various forms of a basic crush, regardless of gender, and if the experts want to really find something interesting, they should research how these relationships are helping people deal, in a relatively safe manner, with their homosexual feelings (or heterosexual feelings in a gay person), which all humans possess on some level and which can be very frightening to some people.

Anyway, there are plenty of times in my life when I've actually purposely set out to look for a celebrity crush just to get me through some rough patches, despite having plenty of real life people around. It's totally healthy, especially when you are aware of what is going on with yourself and allow yourself to enjoy it and laugh at yourself w/o getting a complex about it, as some of these experts like to try to do sometimes, even so subtly.

In my case I usually end up having a crush on the possibility of two celebrities having a crush. As funny as this sounds, it is obvious to me, just from my recent research on The X-Files in which there are about 3 godzillion video posts at YouTube devoted to the Mulder/Scully love affair alone, that this is a very popular form of this phenomenon for sure.

Now if I can only get my hands on old episodes of The X-files to see what all the hoopla is about. From what I've seen so far, this one looks like it may end up being the mother of all celebrity crushes for me! LOL!

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Tawnyblonde wrote: 2d 4h ago

The Celebs will have to do without me as one of their

a##kissers. If it helps YOUR self-esteem to worship them, have at it.

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MagEakaWebutante wrote: 2d 22h ago

Yeah, that's whole purpose of celebrity. We are supposed to think they have ideal lives. There is a fine between admiration and idol worship. I admit to having a couple of

those "Parasocial relationships especially when I younger.

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AnnaJolietL wrote: 2d 23h ago

Yawn!

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slippersox wrote: 3d 4h ago

does anyone else get sick of hearing about these people who do not even have real jobs? i mean, why not look up to people who actually earn respect like soldiers, teachers or even good parents??

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amyfk wrote: 3d 4h ago

I think it is not healthy to do idol worshipping. True, many talented people exist in the world. But that does not mean they are any different from anyone else. The media crazy world we live in, (the power of tv), simply can make ordinary people seem less ordinary.
<http://amyfielder.diiinoweb.com/blog/>

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hangeeee wrote: 3d 7h ago

I always get a high self-esteem when I see Brad Pitt in the Pringles commercial he did years ago:)). Here it is:
http://www.konradsenininformation.com/brad_pitt.html

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