The Multiple Meanings of Age for Television Content Preferences

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Two studies examined how adult age and time of measurement influence media preferences. Study 1 (using TV ratings data from 1970s to 1980s) found that the popularity of genres varied over time, but even after controlling for year, age groups differed in (a) genre choices (consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory) and (b) age of characters viewed (consistent with age identity theory). The average age of characters in each program partially mediated age differences in ratings of comedies and news, and suppressed a negative relationship between viewer age and ratings of violent programs. Study 2 (using 2005 survey data) found similar genre and character preferences. In addition, subjective age predicted age of favorite characters beyond the effect of chronological age.

There have been numerous attempts to explain why we are attracted to particular types of media content at particular moments. The current project seeks to add to that body of work by arguing that developmental considerations play a role, much as do gender (Hoffner & Levine, 2005), personality (Weaver, 1991), and mood (Zillmann, 1985). Cross-sectional research reveals a variety of differences in the media content used by younger and older adults. The questions of interest here are why these differences occur, and what they add to our understanding of media selectivity.

In a recent article, Mares, Oliver, and Cantor (2008) suggested that viewers value different types of media experiences at different ages in part because of developmental changes in emotional priorities. The current article takes up this theme again but, in addition to considering emotional development as an explanation for age differences, also examines two further possibilities. First, that cross-sectional age differences in content preferences reflect differences between generations rather than, or in addition to, maturational changes within individuals. Second, that developmental changes in individuals’ social identities as members of a particular age group (young adult, middle-aged, etc.) or generation may also contribute to preferences.

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Age differences in genre/affective preferences
What are the age differences in genre/affective preferences that need explanation? For an extensive review of the relevant research, readers are referred to Van der Goot, Beentjes, and van Selm (2006), but the main patterns are summarized below.

Mares et al. (2008) found that young adults, relative to middle-aged and older adults, expressed greater interest in watching films to feel scared or sad, and more attraction to films with dark, violent, scary, and sad content. In addition, when asked to think back to their preferences during their adolescence, middle-aged and older women (but not men) reported that they used to be more interested in watching films to feel sad, and both genders reported that they used to be more interested in watching to feel scared. Consistent with this, researchers have noted the popularity of horror films among younger viewers (Tamborini & Stiff, 1987). Fischoff, Dimopolous, Nguyen, and Gordon (2003) noted that younger adults were more likely to choose highly violent characters from slasher films as their favorite movie monsters and to like them for their “killing prowess.”

In contrast, several studies suggest that older adults often prefer less disturbing material (Bliese, 1986; Gauntlett & Hill, 1999; Riggs, 1998). Gauntlett and Hill wrote that the favorite programs of older viewers in England tended to be “pleasant” with little violence, swearing, or sexuality. Similarly, some older adults in Tulloch’s (1989) qualitative study emphasized that they valued programs with wholesome qualities that avoided the “constant obscenities, cruelty, and violence” typically seen on TV (p. 181). Most recently, Mares et al. (2008) found that older adults expressed greater interest than young adults in watching films with cheerful, uplifting, or heartwarming content.

A third difference is the consistent finding that older adults, compared with younger adults, report more interest in and more exposure to newspapers and television news (Doolittle, 1979; Rubin & Rubin, 1981; van der Goot et al., 2006). In addition, older adults in several studies have also reported interest in watching other informational programs such as government proceedings (Riggs, 1989) and quiz shows (Vandebosch & Eggermont, 2002).

The final age difference has to do with attraction to humorous material. Mares et al. (2008) found that although there were no age differences in self-reported interest in watching “funny” films, younger adults were more interested in watching slapstick comedies and were more likely to say that they watched films to laugh, feel excited, and alleviate boredom. Similarly, Bartsch (2010) reported that older adults in a German sample were less likely than young adults (18–25) to report having watched a video for “fun” motives (e.g., “makes me laugh” and “amuses me”). These findings are consistent with the results of an experience-sampling study in which older adults, relative to young adults, reported being more interested in maintaining mild positive emotional stability, and less interested in intensifying the positive emotions they currently felt (Riediger, Schmiedek, Wagner, & Lindenberger, 2009).

There is little research on age differences in preferences for different types of humor, though Bliese (1986) noted that older adults enjoyed what she called “mild
humor’’ in family dramas such as The Waltons, and Tulloch (1989) observed that older adults enjoyed sitcoms that focused on the comedy of generational differences.

**Generational differences as a nonmaturational explanation for genre preferences**

Virtually all studies of age differences in media content preferences have used cross-sectional samples. Because of this, it is unclear whether differences reflect change within individuals over the life span, or whether they reflect differences between generations. Perhaps, for example, current groups of older adults report valuing positive, uplifting programs because they have always liked them. Maybe such material is a better fit with the moral and social values that were formed in their early years than content that is violent, scary, or crude. Ryder (1965) wrote that each birth cohort (those persons born in the same time interval and aging together) encounters a particular social heritage and ‘‘carries the impress of the encounter through life’’ (p. 844). He argued that age should be considered not only as a point in the respondents’ life cycle but also as a temporal location—for example, that a particular group was in their 20s in the 1930s as opposed to the 1980s.

What indication is there of cohort differences in evaluations of media content? A 2004 Gallup poll (Jones, 2004) reported linear age differences in self-reports of feeling offended by various types of television content. At the two ends of the sample, younger adults (18- to 29-year olds) were less likely than older adults (aged 65+) to report feeling offended by TV violence (42 vs. 79%), TV sex (35 vs. 80%), TV depictions of homosexuality (25 vs. 72%), and TV profanity (33 vs. 80%). Similarly, a 1999 Gallup poll (Carlson, 2002) found that younger adults, relative to older adults, were less likely to be ‘‘extremely or very’’ offended by nudity in films (22 vs. 72%), or by sexual activity in films (25 vs. 80%).

But do these sizable age differences reflect cohort differences or rising conservatism with age? That is, would the respondents who were 65 in 2004 have been as offended by depictions of sexuality, violence, and profanity when they were younger (either by those depictions that prevailed during their youth or, hypothetically, by current representations)? Two cross-time comparisons from Gallup polls produce somewhat uneven results. With regard to media violence, 42% of teens (aged 13–17) in 1977 agreed that there was too much violence in the movies compared with 23% of teens in 1999 and 27% of teens in 2003. With regard to sexuality, 42% of teens in 1977 agreed that there was too much sex in the movies compared with 28% in 1999 and 40% in 2003 (Kiefer, 2003; Mazzuca, 2002). Thus, although there are differences between the three sets of teens from different birth cohorts, it is not always a linear change toward more tolerance of controversial media content.

Embedded within the cohort hypothesis is the implication that media content has changed historically, that is, earlier cohorts feel increasingly alienated as depictions of sexuality, violence, and profanity become more frequent and explicit. In fact, Hetsroni (2007a) reported that (contrary to popular opinion) the frequency per hour of most types of sexual content (including implied intercourse and unmarried intercourse) decreased between 1975 and 2004 on U.S. prime-time network programming.
A similar analysis of violence on prime-time network programming between 1960 and 2002 indicated that the frequency per hour of most forms of physical aggression peaked in the late 1970s and then again in the mid-1990s (Hetsroni, 2007b), rather than simply increasing linearly. Although cable increased the availability of graphic depictions of sex and violence, broadcast TV content had not changed as much as was commonly thought.

Overall then, the case for cohort changes being an explanation for cross-sectional findings of age differences is currently tentative. The data set we have in Study 1 allows for a rudimentary examination of whether age differences in TV ratings data from the 1970s are consistent with age differences in the 1980s and with the patterns in more recent data sets (as in Study 2 of this article, or as reported by Mares et al., 2008). If the age patterns were consistent across multiple time of measurement, this would argue against birth cohort as a counterexplanation for cross-sectional age differences.

**Emotional development as an explanation for affective/genre preferences**

As noted earlier, Mares et al. (2008) suggested that age differences in content preferences might reflect maturational changes in emotional preferences instead of, or in addition to, generational differences. Two theoretical accounts were examined: Arnett’s (2000, 2004) description of emerging adulthood as a time of conscious, intense exploration of emotions, personality, and life experiences (including dangerous, exciting experiences) and Carstensen’s theory of socioemotional selectivity (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999).

The core argument of the latter (only briefly summarized here) is that emotional preferences are affected by the goals associated with different life stages. Young adults (who typically perceive themselves as having an open-ended, expansive future) tend to have primary goals of knowledge gain and personal achievement. In the pursuit of these aims, they may be willing to undergo unpleasant experiences that offer long-term benefits or the chance for growth. At the same time, given their sense of unlimited time, they are relatively unconcerned about making every moment count.

The theory further argues that as individuals grow older, they tend to perceive the future to be more finite, and they focus more on achieving emotional satisfaction, stability, and meaningfulness in the present by avoiding unnecessary negative or pointless experiences. However, Carstensen et al. (2000) emphasized that older adults do not simply pursue happiness, but rather work to balance the need for meaningfulness with the desire for stability.

Given the above account, one possible explanation for young adults’ greater interest in gore, horror, and other intensely negative media content is that this material offers them the opportunity to have arousing, novel experiences that cannot readily (or safely) be had otherwise. Conversely, heartwarming content may offer older adults the emotional satisfaction and steadiness that they reportedly seek. Consistent with this, Mares et al. (2008) found that younger adults expressed greater interest in experiencing negative affect in their everyday lives and that this interest provided partial mediation of age differences in desire to see dark, scary film content.
Older adults expressed greater interest in experiencing positive emotional stability in their everyday lives, and this partially mediated age differences in interest in seeing heartwarming film content.

What about news and situationcomedies, the two other genres for which there are reports of age differences? Mares et al. (2008) did not consider age differences in news viewing, but one can imagine two rival hypotheses afforded by the above accounts of emotional development, only one of which fits with the extant data. First, given that news frequently focuses on violence and catastrophe, one might expect that older adults would avoid watching news as an unnecessary source of unpleasant experiences and that young adults would seek out this type of content both for the knowledge and for the possible emotional impact. On the other hand, studies (Riggs, 1998) suggest that news viewing is considered particularly meaningful by older adults—therefore one might predict that older adults would be more likely to focus on this type of content than younger adults. As noted earlier, most viewing data actually support the latter version.

Similarly, socioemotional selectivity theory potentially generates two rival hypotheses about attractions to humorous content. Given the desire for positive affect, one might expect older adults to be more interested than younger adults in watching situation comedies. On the other hand, age differences in perceived need to spend time meaningfully rather than “wasting” it might be associated with less interest in comedic material, if such content were perceived as trivial or silly. As discussed earlier, there is some empirical evidence to suggest that interest in comedies decreases with age, though as yet there are no systematic investigations of whether these age differences are explained by differences in perceived meaningfulness.

Age differences in character preferences
Research suggests that, in addition to showing preferences for particular genres, viewers have preferences about the age of the characters they watch. Harwood (1997) examined the age distribution of characters in the most popular fictional programs for children (2–11), young and middle-aged adults (18–54), and older adults (65+). The different groups of viewers overlapped on many programs, but those programs that appeared in the top 10 list of only one age group (i.e., were not popular with the other groups) differed in age of the main characters—each group watched characters that were relatively close to their own age. Consistent with this, there are various reports of older adults’ fondness for programs (such as Murder She Wrote, Golden Girls, Jake and the Fatman, Cosby, Diagnosis Murder, and Walker, Texas Ranger) that feature older protagonists in lead roles (Mundorf & Brownell, 1990; Robinson, Skill, & Turner, 2004; see also Mares & Cantor, 1992). Thus, there is some indication that viewers of different ages enjoy watching depictions of their own age group, in addition to sharing a common pool of popular programs with other age groups.

Age identity as an explanation for character preferences
Harwood (1997, 1999) suggested that viewers sometimes seek out characters who are similar to them in age because doing so potentially offers self-affirming messages
about the prevalence and social significance of their age group and therefore supports a positive age identity. In addition, Hogg (2000) has suggested that individuals seek out social identities to reduce uncertainty “about who they are, what they should think, feel and do, and how they should interrelate with others” (p. 248). He argued that social identities offer prototypes, and the clarity offered by these prototypes is appealing, particularly in periods of transition where uncertainty is high. Thus, viewers of all ages may seek out characters who are similar to them in age, both for emotional gratification and information.

The time period of one’s youth

A related form of identity may focus on having been young at a particular historical moment. Research on the “reminiscence bump” in autobiographical memory (Gluck & Bluck, 2007) finds that adults tend to recall more from their second and third decade of life than from other stages and perceive events from those periods to have been highly influential in shaping their life course. Consistent with this, Gauntlett and Hill (1999) speculated that interest in media content related to one’s young adulthood increases in old age as part of the developmental task of trying to make sense of one’s life. Indeed, Holbrook and Schindler (1999) reported that adults tended to prefer films from their late adolescence or early adulthood. Given this, there is reason to expect that, when given the chance, viewers will seek out content depicting the historical period of their youth.

Character preferences as an explanation for genre preferences

Thus far we have discussed genre and character age separately, but these two attributes of media content may be related. We did not find any content analyses that have examined whether genres vary in the age of characters, but casual observation suggests that, for example, news is a source not only of useful information but also of older, authoritative newscasters. Situation comedies are not only humorous but also often focus on the tribulations of young adults. Quiz shows often feature an older, congenial host. Perhaps part (or all) of the reason why younger and older adults are attracted to different genres has to do with the age of characters who predominate in that content. Controlling for character age might reduce or eliminate age differences in genre preferences.

There are no direct tests of this hypothesis thus far. Both Mares and Cantor (1992) and Harwood (1999) offered adults the option of choosing content featuring younger versus older adults, but in both studies they held the genre comparable. Thus, their data did not speak to the issue of whether (for example) older adults would choose comedy over drama if comedy were the best option for seeing same-age characters.

The current projects

We conducted two studies to investigate the above explanations of age differences. In Study 1, we used TV ratings data from the 1970s and 1980s. We examined whether the prior reports of age differences in content preferences were replicated in our
data set, whether they varied by time of measurement as would be expected if there were cohort shifts in preferences, whether viewer age predicted character age, and whether genre differences in character age explained viewers’ genre preferences. We also examined whether older adults were, in fact, more likely than younger adults to watch programs set in earlier time periods. In Study 2, we further explored the effects of age identity and emotional development, using recent survey data to examine interactions between viewers’ chronological age, subjective age identity, and affective evaluations of aging in predicting their choices of favorite TV character and program.

**Study 1**

Study 1 used national Nielsen ratings data for the years 1973 and 1978–1987 (these were the only years available). The raw data were in the form of ranked lists of the top 15 programs for four groups of viewers: males versus females aged 18–49 versus 55+. Each program was coded for genre, the age of the characters, and the time period in which the program was set. Given the crude age categories and the short time period, we could not conduct age–period–cohort modeling. However, we could examine whether the patterns were consistent with the argument that cross-sectional age differences reflect earlier cohorts’ preferences for news and later cohorts’ attractions to comedies and violence. The hypothesis is:

H1: Within each age group, there will be time of measurement differences in ratings of violent programs (action adventure, Westerns, and crime dramas), situation comedies, and news programming such that those measured earlier (thus born earlier, on average) will show less interest in violence and comedies and more interest in news than those measured later (born later, on average).

The emotional development explanations for genre preferences suggest that:

H2: Even after controlling for time of measurement, older adults (relative to younger adults) will watch more news programs and fewer situation comedies and violent programs.

The prior research on character preferences, combined with theorizing about the social identity functions of age groups and the importance of one’s youth, suggests that:

H3a: Even after controlling for time of measurement, the average age of characters watched by older adults will be higher than the average age of characters watched by younger adults.

H3b: Older adults will watch programs that are (on average) set in earlier times than the programs watched by younger adults.

In addition, we raised the following possibilities that, given the lack of prior research, we pose as research questions rather than hypotheses.
RQ1: Are there genre differences in the average age of main characters?

RQ2: Does character age mediate viewer age differences in genre preferences?

Method

The raw data and the data set
The raw data were contained in the archives at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. They were in the form of booklets containing ranked lists of the top 15 programs (based on national ratings data) averaged over 2-week periods for four groups of viewers: males versus females aged 18–49 versus 55+. Booklets were available for multiple weeks for the years 1973 and 1978–1987, but were unavailable for the 5 years between 1973 and 1978. This information was entered into a data set that contained a line of data for each character (up to a maximum of 12) appearing in each program in the top 15 lists for each of the four viewer groups for each 2-week period. This was collapsed into a smaller data set by averaging the ages of characters in each program (to equalize the effects of programs with large and small casts). This smaller data set (used in all analyses presented here) contained a line of data for each particular program watched by a particular age/gender audience on a particular date (15 programs × 2 viewer age groups × 2 viewer genders × 31 time points = 1,860 lines of data). Each line of data contained the program name, audience gender, audience age, program rank (from most popular [1] to least popular [15]), average age of the characters in that program, program genre, historical setting, and the date when the program was aired.

Coding the data

Age of characters. Two undergraduate coders generated a list of the characters who appeared in each program at each time of measurement by referring to a directory of television programming by Brooks and Marsh (2003). It listed the character and actor names for all prime-time network and cable television shows from 1946 to 2002 and specified the years that specific characters were on the show. For nonfiction programs, it listed the names of the host or newscaster or regular guests and indicated the years they were part of the program. The two types of programs for which we could not list characters were sports and films (film titles were not given).

Robinson et al. (2004) suggested that older viewers might appreciate even secondary characters if they were similar in age. Because of this we included up to 12 characters for each program. Initially, we planned to code each character’s age but this proved impractical because for older programs there frequently were no episodes or images available for us to code. Instead we used actor age. The coders looked up the actor’s age (for simplicity, we use this term even for game show hosts or newscasters) on the Internet Movie Database Website (IMDB), database and, when it was not available there, on a designated series of further Websites. Despite this, actors’ ages were not always available, and at times there was conflicting information on different Websites. However, we could always determine what decade the actor was in during the time of the program, so we coded actor age in decades. Actors who
were teenagers or younger were coded as 1, those in their 20s were coded as 2, and so on. These codes were used not only for determining age differences in character age preferences but also to examine changes in character age over time and genre differences in character age.

**Codes for genre.** Each program was coded for genre, using the Brooks and Marsh (2003) directory. We combined police/crime, action adventure, and Westerns into a category of “violent programming.” News/documentary/investigative reporting programs and situation comedies were the other two genres of interest here. We originally tried coding the level of violence and sexuality of episode descriptions on TV.com and IMDB, but the descriptions were too vague and sporadic. In the end, we went with a pragmatic judgment that crime dramas, Westerns, and action adventure programs were more likely, on average, to contain violence than situation comedies or other dramas. If anything, this was a conservative way of testing our age hypothesis because we were thereby including programs such as *Murder She Wrote*, which contained sanitized, nonthreatening depictions of violence.

**Analytic strategy.** Each program was coded dichotomously for each genre (i.e., news vs. not news, situation comedies vs. not, and violent programming vs. not). We conducted logistic regressions to assess the probability that a specific genre was among the top 15 programs for each age group. For hypotheses about mean character age, we used ordinary least squares regression.

**Results**

**H1: Time of measurement differences for each age group**

H1 proposed that within each age group, those measured later (therefore born later, on average) would show less interest in news and more interest in situation comedies and violence than those measured earlier. To test this, we ran multilevel logit regressions for the younger and older groups separately, with viewer gender and year of measurement as predictors of whether each program was news or not, situation comedies or not, or violent or not. For each age group, there were a total of 930 programs being analyzed.

Counter to H1, there were no significant effects of time of measurement for news viewing in either sample, though the coefficient was in the expected direction for samples of 18- to 49-year olds ($b = -0.07$, ns). Successive samples of older adults remained invariant in their viewing of news programs ($b = -0.01$, ns).

Also inconsistent with H1, successive samples of 18- to 49-year olds were stable in their viewing of situation comedies over time ($b = -0.01$). Moreover, successive samples of adults aged 55+ were 6% less likely to have situation comedies in the top 15 ($b = -0.06$, $p < .05$; OR = 0.94), rather than more likely as expected if cohort differences were the reason for age differences.

Consistent with H1, samples of 18- to 49-year olds were 10% more likely to have violent programming in the top 15 with each successive year ($b = 0.10$, $p < .01$; OR = 1.10). However, inconsistent with H1, the series of samples of older adults did not vary over time in their viewing of violent programming ($b = 0.00$).
**H2: Age and content preferences**

H2 (the maturational hypothesis) predicted that older people, compared with younger people, would prefer to watch more news, and fewer situation comedies and violent programs, even after controlling for time of measurement. To test this we ran multilevel logit regressions (with each age/gender/year group as the clustering variable), looking for main effects of viewer age on the likelihood of specific genres appearing in the top 15, as well as looking for interactions between viewer age and program rank. The results are summarized in Table 1 and illustrated in Figures 1a–1c. As shown in Table 1, there were significant interactions between age and program popularity (rank) for all three genres, consistent with H2. The main effects of age for news and comedies were also significant: The probability that any given program was news was higher for older adults; the probability that it was a sitcom was higher for younger adults.

Figures 1a–1c illustrate the age by rank interactions by showing the model-based probabilities that for each age group at each rank, a program was of the genre of interest. Figure 1a shows the pattern for news: Among older adults, the more popular a program was, the more likely it was to be news; among younger viewers, each increase in popularity was associated with slightly less probability that the program was news. Figure 1b shows the pattern for situation comedies: Among older adults, the more popular a program was, the less likely it was to be a situation comedy; for younger adults, the model-based predicted probabilities for sitcoms hovered between .31 and .32 across all 15 popularity ranks. Figure 1c shows the pattern for violence: Among older adults, the probability that a program was violent was around .14 and .15 across all 15 popularity ranks; for younger adults, less popular programs were

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>News</th>
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<th>Comedies</th>
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<th>Violence</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viewer gender</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.13</td>
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<td>.20</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.45***</td>
<td>.13</td>
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<td>Time of measure</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program rank</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age × Rank</td>
<td>-0.13***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05*</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>LR $\chi^2$ (5)</td>
<td>49.40***</td>
<td>50.23***</td>
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<td>16.42**</td>
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**Note:** Viewer gender coded 0 = men, 1 = women. Program rank coded 15 = least, 1 = most popular. $N = 1,860$. $Bs$ are unstandardized coefficients used because the original scales have substantive interpretations. LR $\chi^2$ test is the log-likelihood test comparing the full model with the null model (i.e., with intercept only). The predictors in all the three models ($df = 5$) significantly improved the fit to the data.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. 
Figure 1 Age differences in rankings for news, sitcoms, and violent programs in Study 1. (a) News; (b) situation comedies; and (c) violence.

Note: Program ranking: 1 = most watched and 15 = least watched. Scores are model-based predicted probabilities that the program at that rank is of the specified genre.
more likely to be violent ($p = .24$) than more popular programs (.11). This pattern, combined with the lack of a significant main effect for age, indicates weaker support for H2 with regard to violence than for the other two genres.

What are exemplars of each age group’s preferences? Among younger adults, across the years of measurement, the following programs appeared most frequently in the top five: NFL, Bill Cosby Show, Family Ties, Cheers, Dallas, Dynasty, Laverne and Shirley, MASH, and Three’s Company. Among older adults, the programs that appeared most often in the top five were Sixty Minutes, World Series, Alice, Dallas, Murder She Wrote, All in the Family, The Jeffersons, Bill Cosby Show, Falcon Crest, Magnum PI, and The Waltons. Thus, there was both overlap and dissimilarity in the TV worlds of younger and older viewers.

**Viewer age predicting character age and historical setting**

H3a predicted that even after controlling for time of measurement, older adults (relative to younger adults) would watch programs with older characters. The results of a multiple regression predicting character age (summarized in Table 2) show main effects of time of measurement as well as the predicted effect of viewer age. Over the time span of the data set (from early 1970s to later 1980s), there was a decrease in the average age of characters (from approximately 3.84 in 1973 to 3.23 in 1987—numbers reflect the fact that age was coded in decades). Specifically, there were significant decreases over time in character age for sitcoms ($b = -0.06, SE = .012, p < .01$) and for violent programs ($b = -0.05, SE = .012, p < .01$), but no change in “character” age for news programming. Beyond these changes, however, viewer age positively predicted the mean age of characters, and there was a significant interaction effect between age group and program rank. As illustrated in Figure 2, for older samples there was a positive linear relationship between the age of the characters and the popularity of the program. This relationship was reversed for younger adults. For all three genres, older viewers chose programs with older characters more often than did younger viewers (news: 3.74 vs. 3.34; situation comedies: 3.66 vs. 3.26; violence: 3.70 vs. 3.30 model-based predicted mean character ages). H3 was supported.

H3b suggested that programs watched by older adults would be set in earlier times than those watched by younger adults. In fact, most programs were set less than 10 years prior to the airdate (89% for younger; 91% for older). Viewer gender, age, time of measurement, program ranking, and the interaction between viewer age and program ranking were included as predictors in a multilevel regression predicting the number of decades prior to air date in which the program was set. There was a significant main effect for viewer age, $b = 0.27, SE = .08, p < .001 (N = 1,685)$. There was no significant interaction between viewer age and program ranking ($p = .340$), nor was there a main effect of program ranking ($p = .465$). There was a significant effect of time of measurement ($b = -0.12, SE = .01, p < .001$), suggesting that programs set in earlier times were less likely to be aired as time went by. Examination of the data indicated that younger adults were more likely than older adults to watch programs set 10–19 or 20–29 years earlier; older adults were
Table 2 Predicting the Age of Characters in TV Programs in Study 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>β</th>
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<td>Viewer age</td>
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<td>0.29***</td>
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<td>-0.08*</td>
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<td>Program rank</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age × Rank</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.16***</td>
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<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
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</table>

Note: Viewer gender coded 0 = men, 1 = women. Program rank coded 1 = least, 15 = most popular. N = 1, 185. Robust standard errors are appropriate to report here as they adjust the possible intracluster correlations for cluster-structured data. *p < .05; ***p < .001.

more likely than younger adults to watch programs (such as Westerns) set 60, 70, or 80 years earlier. Thus, although there was a small, significant difference in the expected direction, the pattern of viewing did not fit with the argument that older adults are more likely than younger adults to watch programs set during periods of their youth.

Age of characters as a mediator of content preferences
RQ1 asked whether there would be genre differences in the ages of main characters, and RQ2 asked whether the age of characters would mediate the relationship between age and genre preference. We had already established the relationships between age...
and genre preferences (H2), and the relationship between viewer age and character age (H3). Next, we regressed the average age of characters in each program on the probability of the program belonging to each genre. Our findings showed that the older the characters, the more likely it was that a program was news rather than nonnews $b = 0.92, p < .001$ (predicted mean age for news was 4.10 vs. 3.36 for nonnews—roughly corresponding to 40s vs. 30s). Similarly, the older the characters, the more likely it was that a program was from a violent rather than nonviolent genre, $b = 0.46, p < .001$ (predicted mean age was 3.72 for violent and 3.36 for nonviolent programs). Finally, the older the character, the less likely it was that a program was a situation comedy $b = −0.61, p < .001$ (predicted mean age was 3.13 for sitcom comedy vs. 3.68 for programs that were not).

To examine whether character age mediated the relationships between viewer age and genre preferences, we reran the regression models used to test H2, controlling for character age. For news programming, the previously observed effect of viewer age was reduced from $b = 1.03 (p < .01)$ to $b = 0.45 (p < .05)$. For situation comedies, the effect of viewer age was reduced from $b = −0.45 (p < .001)$ to $b = −0.31 (p < .05)$. Sobel tests of these reductions were significant (Sobel test statistic = 6.57; $p < .001$ for news, and $−6.34, p < .001$ for situation comedies).

In contrast, for violent programs, controlling for character age increased the negative effect of viewer age from $b = −0.16$ (ns) to $b = −0.44, p < .01$, suggesting that character age was a suppressor of age differences in interest in viewing violent content. The Sobel test of this change was also significant (Sobel test statistic = 5.10; $p < .001$). Posthoc examination of the “violent” programs watched by older adults suggested that they were frequently choosing crime dramas such as Barnaby Jones, Murder She Wrote, or Matlock, where a likable older character competently solved a murder investigation in every episode but there was comparatively little action (let alone gore). In contrast, younger adults watched programs such as Miami Vice, The Fall Guy, and The Dukes of Hazzard, which (though not particularly gory) contained more action and younger characters.

A second, posthoc question that arose was whether time of measurement differences in average character age might explain time of measurement differences in genre choices. However, controlling for character age in those genres did not significantly alter time of measurement effects.

**Discussion**

There was some very slight indication of historical changes in content choices made by younger and older adults. However, even controlling for time of measurement, older adults watched more news and fewer situation comedies or violence. They watched programs with older characters. Character age provided partial mediation of age differences in viewing of news and situation comedies. Further, character age suppressed the negative relationship between viewer age and viewing of violence.

A limitation of Study 1 was the crude measure of chronological age (younger vs. older). Moreover, both age identity and socioemotional selectivity theory would
suggest that respondents’ subjective interpretations of their age (the age group with which they identify or their perceptions of time remaining) should affect their preferences. Study 2 (using data from 2005) contained a continuous measure of chronological age as well as measures of participants’ subjective age identity and level of distress about aging. We examined whether these predicted media choices.

**Study 2**

A community sample of adults, aged 18–90, was asked to identify their favorite television character and program (as part of a larger study focusing on media use and body image across the adult life span). We expected to replicate the age differences in genre choices observed in Study 1, though it seemed probable that these would be muted given that we only had one favorite program rather than multiple ratings of the top 15 programs.

H4: Chronological age will positively predict choice of news and negatively predict choice of situation comedies and violence as the respondent’s favorite program.

We also expected to replicate the relationship between viewer age and age of characters watched.

H5: There will be a positive relationship between respondents’ chronological age and the age of their favorite TV character.

On the other hand, if age identity issues were part of the reason for this relationship, then we would expect to see the relationship vary by respondents’ subjective age identity.

**Age, subjective age, and favorite character age**

One possibility suggested by social identity theory and to some extent by prior research on age identity (Harwood, 1998) is that viewers’ subjective age, as well as their chronological age, would predict the age of their favorite character—thus among those of the same objective age, those who feel younger would prefer younger characters than those who feel older. The hypothesis that follows from this account is:

H6: Subjective age will be positively associated with age of favorite character, even after controlling for chronological age.

However, some research suggests that feeling one’s age (or older than one’s age) is perceived more negatively as one ages, which in turn implies that age identity effects may not be entirely straightforward. For example, various studies note that as people age, they are increasingly likely to postpone the perceived onset of each new stage and identify with ages that are younger than their chronological age (Heckhausen & Krueger, 1993; Kaufman & Elder, 2002; Montepare & Lachman, 1989). Barrett (2003, 2005) found that middle-aged and older adults (but not younger adults) who felt older than their chronological age perceived themselves to have poor health and
low control over critical life domains, including family and work (see also Bowling, See-Tai, Ebrahim, Gabriel, & Solanki, 2005).

To the extent that older age identities are associated with ill health and anxiety about aging, we could expect that those who held them would be motivated to avoid same-age or older characters that would serve as reminders or upward social comparison (Mares & Cantor, 1995; Zillmann, 1985). This suggests the following alternatives to H6:

H7a: There will be an interaction between chronological age and subjective age in predicting age of favorite character. Among younger adults, the relationship will be positive; among older adults, the relationship will be negative.

H7b: The negative relationship between subjective age and age of favorite character among older adults will be mediated by concern about health and distress about aging.

Methods
Participants
In 2005, 940 adults who had been randomly sampled for jury duty in Pima County, Arizona (using sampling frames based on voter registration records and motor registration records) agreed to participate while they were assembled at the courthouse waiting to be called.

Unfortunately, the open-ended questions (favorite TV character and favorite TV program) that constituted the main dependent variables analyzed here were only completed by a subset of this sample, in part because of time pressures as participants tried to complete the questionnaire before being called. In addition, for the question about favorite character, some participants either listed the whole cast of a program (e.g., “everyone in Law and Order”) or did not indicate what age they thought the character was. We finished with what were, in effect, convenience samples of 830 adults for analyses involving favorite programs and 520 adults for analyses involving age of favorite character. We acknowledge the limitations of these nonrandom subsamples, but argue that the value of adding to the tiny set of research on age identity and media preferences outweighs these limitations.

The subset of 830 adults who answered questions about favorite programs did not differ significantly from the original full sample in age or distribution of gender and race. The subsample of 520 adults who answered the favorite character questions was slightly younger than the group who did not, $F(1,936) = 9.09, p < .01; M = 42.66, SD = 15.5$, vs. $M = 44.13, SD = 15.92$, and had a significantly higher proportion of women ($\chi^2 = 7.33, df = 1, p < .01, 63\%$ vs. $55\%$). There were no differences in racial/ethnic composition of the samples.

Procedure
As part of standard courthouse procedure, the potential jurors typically waited for 30–60 minutes to see if they would be needed. During that time the researcher briefly described the project, distributed questionnaires to those who were willing
to participate, and gathered the questionnaires once they were completed. The questionnaire took approximately 20–25 minutes to complete.

**Measures**
The measures analyzed in this article are a subset of a series of questions about media use, body image, physical activity, and attitudes toward aging.

**Favorite TV programs and genre preferences.** The question read: “Are there any programs that you particularly enjoy and make an effort to watch every week? For your three favorites, please write down the names, and the day of the week that they’re on. If you can’t remember the exact name, write down what it’s about or any other clues.” Because of time constraints, many participants only filled out one favorite program and so only the first program was analyzed. Participants received a score of 1 for violence if their favorite program was either a police/crime drama or an action adventure program (n = 191, 23%), 1 for humor if their favorite program was a situation comedy (n = 140, 17%), and 1 for news if their favorite program was either a local or national news program (n = 156, 19%).

**Favorite TV character age.** The question (somewhat ungrammatically) read: “WHO do you like on television? Are there any characters or people on television that you particularly like? Please write down their names and the name of the program they’re in. If you can’t remember exact names of characters, describe what they do, their age, etc.” Participants could list up to three names in a table, and for each one they indicated the gender, age (under 20, aged 20–30, 31–50, or over 50) and the name of the program within which the character appeared. As noted earlier, we only used the age of the first character. We had two ways of assessing the age of the favorite character—respondents’ perceptions and, as in Study 1, the age of the actor.

**Chronological age.** As part of a demographics section (including gender, race/ethnicity, marital, and retirement status) participants were asked: “What is your age?” For the sample of 830 respondents who answered about their favorite program, M = 43.17, SD = 15.7, min/max = 18–88. For the sample of 520 who answered about their favorite character, M = 42.66, SD = 15.5, min/max = 18–88.

**Subjective age.** In a later section, participants read: “Sometimes people think they look younger or older than they feel inside. What age do you feel yourself to be most of the time?” (M = 35.72, SD = 12.78, min/max = 5–81). This item was based on the measure of subjective aging in the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (Brim et al., 2000), although there the question was: “Many people feel older or younger than they actually are. What age do you feel most of the time?” Our wording was somewhat different because the emphasis of the survey was on body image, and we were also asking about their perceptions of how old they looked. The item is used here as an indicator of subjective age.

**Distress about aging.** Participants rated seven statements (e.g., “The changes caused by aging are too great. I feel pretty comfortable with the idea of aging. My age
isn’t something I worry about.”) on a scale from 0 to 5. These items were based on Lewis and Cachelin’s (2001) measures of concern about aging. Cronbach’s alpha for the seven items was .74. After reverse coding positive items, the items were averaged ($M = 3.21, SD = .98$, min/max = 0.33–5).

**Concern about health**
Participants rated the extent to which health was “currently a concern for you” on a scale from 0 to 5 ($M = 4.05, SD = 1.08$, min/max = 0–5).

**Results**

**H4: Age and genre preferences**
H4 predicted that chronological age would be positively associated with choice of news as favorite program and negatively associated with choices of sitcoms or violent programs. Because genre preferences were coded as a series of dichotomous variables, we ran logistic regressions, entering chronological age and gender as predictors.

For news, there were significant effects of both age ($b = 0.05, SE = .01, p < .001; OR = 1.05$) and gender ($b = −.64, SE = .20, p < .01; OR = 0.53$), such that older adults were slightly more likely than younger adults, and men were almost twice as likely as women, to list a news program as their favorite ($χ^2(2) = 68.85, N = 833, p < .001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .14$).

For situation comedies, there were significant effects of both age ($b = −0.03, SE = .01, p < .001; OR = 0.972$) and gender ($b = −0.474, SE = .22, p < .05; OR = 0.62$), such that younger adults were slightly more likely than older adults, and women were almost twice as likely, to list a situation comedy as their favorite ($χ^2(2) = 22.36, N = 833, p < .001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .05$).

For violence, neither age nor gender was significant predictor, and the overall model was nonsignificant. Posthoc, we looked to see if we would observe age differences in the nature of the violent programs chosen. In fact, there was remarkable consistency in all three age groups. Over 60% of those who chose a violent favorite listed *CSI, Law and Order, Lost,* or *NYPD Blue* as their favorite. Thus, H4 was only partially supported—there were the predicted (though small) age differences for news and comedies, but no age difference in choice of violence.

**H5–H7: Age, subjective age, and favorite character age**
To test the effects of chronological and subjective age in predicting favorite character age, we ran a multiple regression entering age and subjective age on the first step and the interaction term (both centered) on the second step. As predicted by H5, there was a significant positive main effect of chronological age ($b = 0.26, SE = .05, t(504) = 4.97, p < .001$). As predicted by H6, there was also a significant main effect for subjective age ($b = .14, SE = .07, t(504) = 2.05, p < .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .17$). The predicted interaction (H7a) was not significant.

In an alternate analysis, we used respondents’ perceptions of the age of their favorite character as the dependent measure (as opposed to actor age). On the one
hand, this measure was much less subtle (given the four age categories); on the other hand, perceived character age is more relevant to age identity theorizing than actor age. In this analysis, the main effects of chronological age and subjective age were again significant (age $b = .03$, $SE = .003$, $t(517) = 6.44$, $p < .001$; subjective age $b = .01$, $SE = .004$, $t(517) = 3.57$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .14$), but this time there was the anticipated interaction between chronological and subjective age, $b = -.001$, $SE = .00$, $t(516) = -2.5$, $p < .05$, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .01$. However, as can be seen from the coefficient, the effect was very small and the plot of the interaction was decidedly unimpressive.

The lack of a meaningful negative relationship between subjective age and favorite character age among older adults rendered our mediation hypothesis (H7b) moot. We decided to investigate, posthoc, whether older adults’ subjective age was actually associated with their distress about aging and concern about health. In fact, the partial correlations (controlling for chronological age) were not significant, indicating that among those over 50, feeling older was not associated with more distress about aging or more concern about health. Given this, it is not surprising that older subjective ages did not predict significant avoidance of older characters.

Discussion
As in Study 1, there were significant age differences in interest in situation comedies and news programs, but not in attraction to violence. Also as in Study 1, age identity effects seemed to be at work—respondents’ chronological and subjective age predicted the age of their favorite character. We did not find compelling evidence in our sample that older adults’ subjective age operated differently in influencing media preferences than younger adults’ subjective age.

General discussion
What do these two studies add to the picture of media selectivity? In the introduction, we suggested that although there are undoubtedly numerous influences on viewers’ media preferences (including short-term shifts in mood and enduring personality traits), there are also predictable changes that occur across the adult life span. The results here support that claim, though clearly further research is needed. The findings were occasionally unanticipated, and the methods had various limitations. Nonetheless, the data point to the importance of understanding age as a factor that shapes the types of media experiences viewers seek out and avoid.

In Study 1, we had the relatively rare opportunity to examine age differences in television use across multiple times of measurement. As we noted in the introduction, cross-sectional research is always open to the question of whether age differences reflect the effects of cohort (successive generations being influenced by different historical contexts) rather than within-individual maturational change. A major benefit of the current data set was to be able to look for evidence of consistency or change in the extent of age differences over time. Moreover, the fact that the
data consisted of national TV ratings meant that we were examining viewers’ actual choices. Zillmann (1985) argued that individuals’ motives in selecting what content to watch are not always open to introspection and that observing their actual choices is potentially more fruitful than asking them to report on their motives or desires. Although both methods seem valuable, the Study 1 data set complements the Mares et al. (2008) study of age differences in self-reported preferences.

Unfortunately, despite these advantages, there were also considerable limitations. Age, period, and cohort effects in media use have been studied in the past by examining differences between 4- and 5-year birth cohorts across multiple decades (Mares & Woodard, 2006; Peiser, 2000). That was not an option here given the broad age ranges and the relatively short time frame of the archival data. That said, we found changes over time in the popularity of sitcoms and violent programming, but these seemed to occur in conjunction with certain consistent age differences. For example, sitcoms became less popular with older adults between 1973 and 1987, but they were consistently popular with younger adults. Violent programs became somewhat more popular among younger adults over time, whereas older adults were stably moderate in their viewing of violence, with no significant age differences in exposure. Across the years of the data set, older adults were reliably heavier viewers of news, even if there was a nonsignificant trend toward less viewing of news among younger adults.

Importantly, these age patterns were echoed in Study 2. In survey data gathered almost 20 years later, younger adults were more likely to name a situation comedy as a favorite TV program than older adults, and older adults were more likely to nominate news. Older and younger adults were equally likely to nominate a program from one of the violent genres as their favorite.

We think of the enduring age differences in news and sitcom viewing as consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory’s description of older adults’ greater emphasis on avoiding trivial and seeking out meaningful experiences. However, an additional motive appears to lie in age identity concerns. In Study 1, controlling for the average age of characters in each program provided partial mediation of age differences in viewing of each genre. Younger adults watched more sitcoms and older adults watched more news and in part this appeared to be because of the age of the characters depicted. In Study 2, subjective age predicted the age of respondents’ favorite characters, beyond the effect of their chronological age.

The intertwined roles of socioemotional and age identity motives were also suggested by the results of exposure to violence in Study 1. On the basis of socioemotional theory’s description of older adults’ greater avoidance of unnecessary negative affect, we had predicted that older adults would be less likely to watch violent genres because such content might be expected to cause fear or distaste. Initially, that prediction seemed unsupported. However, there was, in fact, the predicted negative relationship between viewer age and exposure to violent genres after we controlled for the age of characters in those programs. Thus, older adults seemed to be watching violence to the extent that such content depicted older characters
(typically in programs with hardly any actual depictions of gore or aggression) and otherwise showed the predicted pattern of lower exposure.

In other instances, our hypotheses were not supported. In Study 1, we hypothesized that viewers’ identities as members of particular generations would lead older adults to seek out programs set in earlier times, whereas younger adults would be more interested in programs set in more recent times. Given the broad age ranges, we had little ability to specify the generation to which viewers belonged. Although there was a significant tendency for older adults to watch programs set in earlier times, the pattern of viewing was inconsistent with the idea that each age group prefers representations of its youth. Older adults were watching historical dramas such as Westerns rather than programs set 30–60 years earlier. Experimental work examining the effect of historical setting while holding other features (such as genre) constant would be a better way of investigating this hypothesis.

In Study 2, we proposed contrasting hypotheses about the relationships between subjective age and age of favorite character. The first was the straightforward age identity hypothesis that subjective age would predict age of favorite character, over and above the effects of chronological age. The alternative was that older adults who felt their age or older would actually be motivated to avoid older characters because happy, successful exemplars would be sources of painful upward comparison and more grim depictions would be reminders of their own situation. In fact, this latter account appears to have been unduly negative. At least in our sample, which consisted of adults who were well enough and mobile enough to show up for jury duty, feeling one’s age or older was not problematic and was not associated with significant avoidance of older characters.

At this point, we should acknowledge further the various flaws in our data sets that limit our ability to make conclusions. In Study 1, where we had relatively strong measures of media preferences, we had no measures of age identity and only dichotomous, broad age ranges; in Study 2, where we had a continuous measure of age and at least some indication of subjective age identity, we had only one favorite program and one favorite character per respondent. Respondents estimated the age of their favorite characters using broad categories, limiting our ability to observe the effects of age proximity. Moreover, though we made hypotheses based on theories about emotional development, we had no measures of emotional responses or perceived meaningfulness in either study. As our reviewers pointed out, it is not inherently the case that comedy is meaningless and news is meaningful and that crime dramas are more violent than comedies or news. Clearly, it would be better to have viewers’ perceptions of the programs.

In addition to careful examination of viewers’ perceptions of meaningfulness and affective value of different types of content, further studies need to explore why viewers seek out age similarity, and how that might vary with proximity to major life transitions. In addition, research is needed to investigate whether the effects of mood on media choices (and vice versa) vary developmentally.
Nonetheless, the current findings, tentative though they are, build on the earlier work by Mares et al. (2008) in suggesting that developmental considerations contribute to preferences and that it is inadequate to assume that the processes and preferences observed in young adults (such as undergraduates) are the same as those occurring among older viewers. Our observations about the intertwined contributions of historical moment, age identity, and emotional development are best considered as one part of an ongoing investigation about how and why we change in what we find pleasurable and valuable.

Notes

1 We had ratings data for the top 15 programs for each of the four age/gender groups for the 2-week periods beginning 14/10/73, 8/1/78, 19/2/78, 9/4/78, 14/5/78, 16/7/78, 26/11/78, 22/4/79, 13/1/80, 6/4/80, 20/4/80, 12/7/81, 11/10/81, 25/10/81, 10/1/82, 4/4/82, 18/4/82, 27/3/83, 3/4/83, 23/10/83, 8/1/84, 22/1/84, 28/10/84, 27/1/85, 28/7/85, 27/10/85, 12/1/86, 6/4/86, 27/7/86, 26/10/86, and 19/4/87.

2 Initial reliability checks on a random sample of 15% of the actors indicated that Cohen’s kappa was .93. The lack of complete reliability reflected the fact that coders were using different Websites to determine actor age when it was not initially available on IMDB. Given this, we specified the sequence of Websites to be visited. Following this, discrepancies were resolved, and reliability was 100%.

3 One possibility is that the significant relationships between viewer age and character age exaggerate the availability of older characters by ignoring the fact that a particular program could be present in the top 15 for multiple weeks (or even years). Perhaps older viewers were limited to a small handful of programs in order to find older characters, whereas younger viewers could choose from a wide variety of representations of relative youth. A series of \( \chi^2 \) analyses examined whether there were age differences in the ratio of unique programs to total programs watched by each age group for each year. There were two significant differences over the 11 years (1980 and 1981), both in the direction of younger adults (rather than older adults) watching fewer unique programs. Thus, older adults’ preferences for older characters did not seem to come at the cost of program variety.

4 Given the skew, we tried standardizing the dependent variable, but the results were the same, so we report the more interpretable output here.

References


年龄对电视内容偏好的多重含义

【摘要】

两项研究探讨了成人年龄和测量时间对媒体偏好研究的影响。研究1（使用从1970-1980年代电视收视率数据）发现，不同类型节目的受欢迎程度随着时间的推移而改变，但即使控制年份后，不同年龄组有(1)不同类型的选择（与社会情感选择理论相一致），(2)观看角色年纪各异（符合年龄身份的理论）。节目中角色年纪的平均年龄对喜剧和新闻的收视率有部分中介影响，并减弱了观众年龄和暴力节目收视率之间的负相关。研究2（使用2005年调查数据）发现了类似的类型和角色偏好。此外，主观年龄，与生理年龄相比更能预测喜欢角色的年龄。
Les multiples sens de l’âge dans les préférences de contenus télévisuels

Résumé


Mots clés : identité d’âge, comédie, développement, bulletins de nouvelles, socioémotionnel, violence

Schlüsselbegriffe: Altersidentität, Comedy, Entwicklung, Nachrichten, sozioemotional, Gewalt
요약

두개의 연구들이 어떻게 어른들의 나이와 측정 시간이 미디어 선호도에 영향을 주는가를 연구하였다. 연구 1은 1970년대부터 1980년대사이의 TV 시청률을 사용한 것으로, 이 연구는 유행하는 장르는 시간에 따라 달라진다는 것을 보여주었으나, 시기를 고려하지 않더라도 연령별 집단은 (1) 사회감정선택이론과 일치하게 장르의 선택과 (2) 나이동질성이론과 일치하게 배우들의 연령에 따라 다르다는 것을 보여주고 있다. 각 프로그램에서 배우들의 평균연령은 코미디와 뉴스의 시청률에 있어 연령 차이를 부분적으로 매개하였으며, 시청자들의 연령과 폭력적인 프로그램들의 시청률 사이에서는 부정적인 관계를 보여주었다. 연구 2는 2005년 서베이 데이터를 사용한 것으로, 이는 비슷한 장르와 배우 선호도를 발견하였다. 이외에, 주관적인 연령은 연대기적인 연령의 효과를 넘어선 선호하는 배우들의 연령을 예측하게 하였다.