

Parasocial Relationships as a Predictor of General Belongingness among Senior High School Students

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Abstract. Parasocial relationships have become increasingly popular among adolescents due to emerging technological advancement and rampant digital engagement. This parasocial experience shifted how senior high school students fulfill their sense of belongingness, especially in schools. Several studies have reported the underlying benefits of parasocial relationships toward the development of identity, career trajectory, and body image among adolescents and its adverse effects, such as digital distress and connection overload, on their general well-being. Many studies have investigated the connection between parasocial relationships and mental health; however, few have explored the role of parasocial relationships in fulfilling belongingness among senior high school students in the Philippine context. This study employed a predictive correlational design to examine the relationship and prediction between parasocial relationships and general belongingness among senior high school students ($n=384$) in a public secondary school in Navotas City, Philippines. Using JAMOVI 2.4.14, the study found a significant ($p < 0.008$) weak positive correlation ($R=0.14$) between parasocial relationships and general belongingness among adolescents. Moreover, only 2% of parasocial relationships can predict general belongingness. This one-sided, illusionary relationship between students and celebrities/personas can only influence their belongingness in a tiny fraction. These findings suggested that family, peers, teachers, and institutions may be the primary sources of strong belongingness development. Hence, with the dominant presence of the digital world, a need to balance parasocial relationships and in-person interactions is highly encouraged. School administrators must enhance programs for media literacy, self-awareness, and active participation among senior high school students in school activities such as sports and peer-mentoring initiatives. The researcher recommended that school counselors develop effective interventions that promote a healthy balance between real-life experiences and the digital landscape, leading to students' success.

Keywords: Counseling; General belongingness; Parasocial relationships; Senior high school students

1.0 Introduction

The need to belong in a socially transformative society is fundamental in shaping an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. As inherently social beings, humans naturally seek out and belong to various communities where they can satisfy their needs. Various interaction mediums have been adopted in an era of technological advancement and digital progress. Maintaining belongingness has evolved from traditional in-person interactions to virtual dialogue. One can satisfy interpersonal needs through online rapport and meaningful connections with family, friends, and significant others. Adolescents were labeled digital natives due to the presence of modern technology since birth (Bourke, 2019). This population has been observed to be naturally gifted in adopting all

forms of digital networks. Tatem and Ingram (2022) indicated that parasocial relationships (PSRs) with media figures are increasingly prevalent among adolescents, particularly due to social media use. This phenomenon is a one-sided relationship between famous figures unaware of the other's existence, which is interchanged with parasocial interactions. It is a nonreciprocal interaction between an audience and a media persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). On the other hand, belongingness is a desire to form and maintain relationships with others (Angela, 2023). Moeller et al. (2020) revealed that lack of belongingness can result in depression, loneliness, and social anxiety among adolescents. Hence, determining factors that predict belongingness is vital in promoting well-being among young ones. Fostering a sense of belongingness in schools is crucial for creating a positive educational environment that supports students' mental health.

The global use of social media and other forms altered how individuals connect with others. As an established concept, since 1950, one-sided relationships have occurred between a fan and a media figure, such as celebrities, anime characters, and K-pop icons (Angela, 2023). Parasocial relationships are a unique form of interaction that has emerged from platforms such as radio, television, and movies. These interactions create the illusion of a personal, face-to-face connection between the audience and performers, making viewers feel part of an intimate group. However, despite this perceived closeness, the relationship remains one-sided and is controlled by the performer, lacking true reciprocity or mutual development. As Horton and Wohl (1956) described, parasocial relationships are a type of interaction from an illusion of "intimacy at a distance." Additionally, the media seeks to create new categories of "personalities," such as quizmasters and announcers, further expanding parasocial dynamics' influence in everyday life.

There is strong evidence that adolescents' media consumption, like watching anime, has significantly influenced the individual's interactions and behavior (Zafira et al., 2024). According to a recent global report, Filipinos spend close to 9 hours or more on screens daily, which ranked the Philippines 3rd in the world, following South Africa and Brazil (Purnell, 2024). Nearly 20 million Filipino youth aged 15-24 significantly contributed to this ranking. The surge in digital engagement stems from adolescents' strong desire to connect, interact, and consume digital content. Digital technology has shaped the social environment of Filipino adolescents, emphasizing the worldwide use of social media. Parasocial relationships have become a growing area of study in psychology and counseling. For instance, PSR has been recognized as one of the parasocial experiences (PSEs) that affect an individual's self and social life (The Oxford Handbook of Parasocial Experiences, 2023). Parasocial relationships were associated with adverse effects due to the comparison between individuals and their supposed "partner." This comparison results in loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). In contrast, other studies suggest that parasocial relationships can uplift people's well-being because the established connection can fulfill one's sense of belonging (Angela, 2023). Additionally, one can develop meaningful bonds with media figures, which forms an alternative to "real" social relationships. These differing results indicate that parasocial relationship significantly correlates with elements that foster interpersonal connections (Tukachinsky et al., 2020).

People's motive to belong is a universally accepted need. They develop a sense of belongingness by establishing meaningful social networks and maintaining these connections. Belongingness begins to rise during adolescence and continues until adulthood. This critical period allows adolescents to extend their sense of connectedness to family, friends, school, and broader society. A collective experience of deep connections and rapport with social groups and places constitutes one's sense of belonging (Allen, 2020; Allen et al., 2021). In addition, gaining acceptance, respect, and support from others can help one maintain belongingness (Angela, 2023). As a basic human need, belongingness predicts mental, social, and behavioral outcomes. It has been suggested that belongingness is an innate desire people need to satisfy (Fabris et al., 2023). Slavich (2020) revealed that belongingness is deeply buried in an individual's biological level. The human brain, for instance, prevents the body from avoiding threats and reaching out for social safety and connectedness from other people. Meanwhile, belongingness emerges from social dynamics. An individual's social and cultural spaces, including geographical and environmental, orient oneself based on morality and belongingness (Allen, 2020). One's subjective orientation and feelings of belonging can be changed, reinforced, and challenged. In essence, people's belongingness as a need exists due to connections with the systems to which they belong (Kern et al., 2020). Significant factors causing social disconnections were social mobility, the advent of technology, and the evolving modern life (Baumeister & Robson, 2021). In a survey by Arslan (2021), social exclusion among high school students was correlated with multiple mental health problems and low well-being. Other studies show a positive correlation between the level

of belongingness, loneliness, zest, social anxiety, and optimism (Palikara et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Feelings of unhappiness, including depression, also develop from a lack of belonging among people (Allen et al., 2021). This challenge in social connectedness heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several studies have noted that the impact of social isolation, magnified by community quarantine, lockdowns, and social distancing, increases loneliness and mental illness among vulnerable citizens, such as children and adolescents (Ahmed et al., 2020; Allen, 2020; Dsouza et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Online communities provide a different venue for adolescents to explore various means of interaction. Smith et al. (2021) explained that people will more likely feel lonelier and less belonging if they are unsatisfied with online engagements. Fabris et al. (2023) noted that adolescents with a lower sense of belongingness in school and social media may have lower psychological health and academic achievement. These online engagements may connect to parasocial relationships where online attachment occurs among adolescents. Recent studies have shown the negative impact of lacking belongingness among adolescents, which may lead to mental health problems and suicidal ideations. Disrupted belongingness, interpersonal stress, and suicidal thoughts have significant relationships with one another (Glenn et al., 2021). The study by Swee et al. (2020) found that there is a predicted influence of low social belongingness on suicidal ideations among young people. These results underscore the vitality of meeting the need for belongingness, especially for adolescents. As technology, social media, and internet-based activities become more prevalent among adolescents, it is essential to understand their effects on students' well-being. These digital platforms can foster parasocial relationships and heighten a desire for belonging in various contexts, making it crucial to explore how these impact young people.

Recently, a study by McLaughlin and Wohn (2021) suggested that streamers' characteristics significantly predict experiencing parasocial relationships. In general, real-world media and fictional characters influenced users due to their prevalent nature and characteristics. The concept of parasocial interaction was first introduced in the 1950s by Donald Horton, a sociologist, and his co-author Richard Wohl, a psychiatrist. The term was conceptualized to describe radio broadcasters' intention to allow listeners to feel like they were sitting beside an old friend. This produced an illusion of real or fictional intimacy between radio listeners and personnel. Parasocial relationships are characterized by an enduring mental relational schema caused by parasocial interactions through media exposure. It is formed by repeated encounters that modify the schema over time. Additionally, parasocial relationships can be developed with intense, long-term exposure between users and media figures. This intense experience relates to the one-sided "intimacy at a distance" formed with media performers. Apart from media figures' characteristics, there were a few interesting predictors of parasocial relationships and other parasocial phenomena. The study by Tan-intaraarj and Pornsakulvanich (2021) revealed that social media addiction significantly predicted parasocial friendships and relationships. This implies that the development of parasocial relationships might be closely linked to social media usage, potentially fostering social media addiction (Tatem & Ingram, 2022).

Adolescents have been greatly affected by the advent of technology, which allowed them to be immersed in various forms of media. Their digital access causes them to spend over eight hours daily on screens for multiple activities. These individuals scroll, post, and interact on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok (Rideout et al., 2022). These young audiences and users might develop meaningful connections with real-life celebrities or personas (fictional characters). For instance, they engage in parasocial activities, such as having imaginary connections with celebrities and media figures. A study by Gleason et al. (2017) revealed that adolescents viewed their favorite media figures as partners, with boys more likely to see media athletes as authority figures than girls. The significance of parasocial processes in understanding the developmental period of adolescents plays a role in forming their identity (Erickson, 2023). Parasocial relationships extend beyond simply liking someone from the media (Parent et al., 2024). This phenomenon transcends two aspects: parasocial communication and parasocial support. Parasocial communication pertains to acquired feelings of disclosure with media figures. Meanwhile, parasocial support is developed from trust and perceived helpfulness from the connection. However, reciprocity sets PSR apart from social relationships. One might experience a mutual connection, such as friendship with fictional characters, but the feeling is not reciprocated. However, studies indicate that parasocial relationships enhance social networks for young individuals (Bond, 2018). The findings of Parent et al. (2024) highlighted that social media, which develops parasocial relationships among LGBTQ+ young people, allows for increased interaction with content and content creators. Also, a typical media interaction, such

as the use of an AI chatbot, is prevalent among transgender and nonbinary adolescents. This resulted in finding supportive environments and conversations, lessening the adverse effects of in-person isolation.

While extensive literature exists on the relationship between parasocial relationships and well-being, few have delved into the role of parasocial relationships in satisfying belongingness among senior high school students. As Liebers and Schramm (2019) suggested, due to the polarized focus among young adults, belongingness and parasocial relationships must be navigated among children and adolescents. Furthermore, most literature overlooks how parasocial relationships predict belongingness among senior high school students. Erickson (2023) indicated that parasocial experiences, such as parasocial relationships, could give adolescents a sense of identity, influencing their career prospects and body image perceptions. This study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on the role of parasocial relationships in predicting belongingness among senior high school students. Mental health professionals like school counselors can develop action plans or programs for students' parasocial relationships and belongingness issues to enhance academic engagement and overall well-being.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The quantitative method was employed in this study. The researchers measured the indicators of parasocial relationships and general belongingness among senior high school students. Specifically, the researchers used predictive correlational design to analyze the association of the variables and identify the extent to which they predicted each other. This design determined if the parasocial relationship is significantly related to general belongingness among adolescents. Furthermore, it quantifies the degree and direction of association between parasocial relationships and general belongingness. In this investigation, parasocial relationship is the predictor variable, while general belongingness is the outcome variable.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at Filemon T. Lizan Senior High School at Dr. C. Bauza St. Bagumbayan South Navotas City, Philippines. It caters to Grade 11 and Grade 12 students, with the standard age of 16 to 18. This location is suitable for the study due to the accessibility and concentration of senior high school students who are digital natives exposed to various technology and media platforms. The nature of the site provided adequate responses to the research.

2.3 Research Participants

The study used a stratified proportionate sampling to select the 384 respondents. The stratified proportionate technique first divides a population into distinct groups, or strata, before randomly selecting a proportion from each stratum. The division is based on homogenous characteristics possessed by the target respondents. After the division, a proportion of each stratum was acquired to provide equal allocations. This ensured adequate representation of the population (Bisht, 2024). The study's respondents were senior high school students, specifically Grades 11 and 12. The researchers used the students' academic strands as the strata to allocate the proportion. These are the following strata: Humanities and Social Sciences (HumSS), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM), and General Academic Strand (GAS). A power analysis through the Raosoft application was utilized to compute the sample size. The researchers set the parameters at a .05 margin of error with a confidence level of 95%. The proportionate stratified random sampling formula was utilized to measure each substratum accurately. The researchers divided the sample size and population size multiplied by the strata size. This verified that the results were statistically valid and accurately represented the senior high school students.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researchers gathered the data using two valid and open-access questionnaires. First, the Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale (CPPI) was used to measure the participants' parasocial interaction. This scale was developed by Bocarnea and Brown (2007) and designed to determine how media consumers form parasocial relationships with celebrities or popular fictional characters. The scale explicitly addresses the relationship between celebrities and personas and a kind of mediator that exists due to repeated exposure to famous individuals. In the survey, the participants were asked to rank their level of agreement on the 20 statements using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1 - strongly disagree" to "5 - strongly agree". Items No. 8, 18, and 20 are scored

in reverse. The scale has high reliability with an internal consistency ranging from 0.80 to .90. The criterion validity of the CPPI, or its ability to predict audience recognition of celebrities and personas, was reported as good. Higher total scores reflect more vital parasocial interaction (Khan et al., 2023). In addition, the construct validity is satisfactory. The scale was reported with significant validity and used for adolescents to address their developmental needs, such as identity formation, career identity, and body image perception (Erickson, 2023; Zabukovec & Faganel, 2024). The instrument is available for anyone and can be converted into digital format.

The second scale used is the General Belongingness scale developed by Malone et al. (2007) to measure the general belongingness of the participants. This self-report, 12-item scale was formulated to assess an individual's level of general belongingness. The participants were asked to rate their agreement through a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "1 - strongly disagree" to "7 - strongly agree". The scale was reported to have two subscales. The first subdomain includes items about Acceptance/Inclusion, measured by items 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, and 11. The second subdomain contains items about Rejection/Exclusion, measured by items 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 12. All items on the second subscale are reverse-coded before computing for the overall general belongingness score. The higher score suggests a higher general belongingness. The scale has high reliability with an internal consistency ranging from 0.92 to .94. Strong convergent and predictive validity was obtained. Moreover, the scale was reported to be valid and reliable among adolescents (Tastan, 2024). Permission from the developers was sought to convert this scale into Google Forms.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers obtained the data by doing several steps. Initially, a letter was sent to the principal of the senior high school to ask permission to conduct the study. Second, another letter was sent to the school registrar to get the number of students per academic strand for sample size computation. Third, two consent forms are disseminated to the respondents, including the parent's assent form and the informed consent form. These documents were collected three days later to abide by ethical standards. Lastly, the subjects who voluntarily participated were provided with the link to the Google Form. The online survey was administered through a virtual room, which was facilitated and supervised by the researchers. Clear instructions and ample timeframes were given to ensure clarity among senior high school students. To ensure unbiased responses, the respondents completed the survey in the comfort of their homes, with minimal distractions during the process. Additionally, following the standardization procedures of the scales solidifies the integrity of responses. After meeting the target sample size, the data collected were cleaned, coded, analyzed, and interpreted systematically using JAMovi 2.4.14. This software was utilized due to its free and user-friendly interface. It is widely used across various research disciplines and supports advanced statistical analysis, such as the regression needed for this study. The software also produces APA-formatted tables, figures, and graphs for easy reference. The researchers observed that there is no missing data in the dataset. In addition, the demographic data were unaltered, whereas the text responses to each statement were removed, and only the numerical codes were retained for further analysis. The preliminary assumptions were determined, and it obtained good internal consistency for parasocial relationships ($\alpha = 0.86$) and general belongingness ($\alpha = 0.85$). Additionally, the normality was determined through the Shapiro-Wilk test, wherein both variables were concluded to have a normal distribution ($p = 0.83$). Lastly, collinearity statistics determined a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1.00, which means that the parasocial relationships (predictor) and general belongingness (criterion) are independent of one another. The first frequency tables restated the participants' demographic characteristics, including grade level and age. Next, descriptive statistics that included means and standard deviations were computed to measure the levels of parasocial relationships and general belongingness among senior high school students. Then, correlation analysis was done to establish the extent and direction of the relationship between the parasocial relationship and general belongingness among senior high school students using the probability criterion 0.05. Lastly, the researchers examined the coefficient of determination of parasocial relationship to general belongingness for predictive estimation.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Several key factors were considered to ensure the study adhered to ethical standards. Although an ethics committee did not review this study, the researchers carefully followed established ethical guidelines. The decision not to consult an ethics committee was primarily due to the study's educational context and the minimal-risk nature. Additionally, it is acknowledged that this may pose certain limitations, such as reliance on researchers' ethical judgment. Nonetheless, the researchers ensured that necessary precautions were taken and participants'

rights and well-being were upheld throughout the data collection process. First, a formal request was submitted to the school's principal for approval to administer the survey within the chosen senior high institution. Upon receiving the endorsement, the researchers provided clear information to the participants through informed consent and parental assent forms, which outlined the study's nature and purpose. The respondents were assured that participation was voluntary. Moreover, participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. The names of the subjects were left optional to adhere to anonymity. After the data analysis, all the datasets were encrypted and saved on password-protected devices, accessible only to the researchers to conform with confidentiality. No risks or harms are associated with completing the questionnaires provided. Finally, the study results are expected to be shared with the selected senior high school institution and student participants.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of the respondents in terms of Academic Strand, Age, and Grade Level

The results (see Table 1) indicate the frequency and percentage of the senior high school students (n=384) in terms of the academic strand, age, and grade level. Senior high school students in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics strand have the highest number of participants (f=187, %=48.47). Secondly, the Humanities and Social Sciences strand comprised most respondents (f =103, %=26.8). The remaining participants belonged to Accountancy and Business Management (f=58, %=15.1) and General Academic Strand (f=36, %=9.4). In terms of age, participants who are 16 years old are the highest (f=242, %=63), followed by aged 17 (f=111, %=28.9) and aged 18 (f=23, %=6), 19 years old (f = 6, %=1.6) and the youngest aged 15 (f=2, %=0.5) respectively. Additionally, most participants are grade 11 students, with a frequency of 302 and a percentage of 78.6. At the same time, grade 12 students garnered a frequency of 82 and a rate of 21.4. These demographic data mirror the stratified proportionate sampling utilized in this study. This reflects one of the objectives, which is to generalize the selected sample to the general population of senior high school students.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the senior high school students

Academic Strand	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Accountancy and Business Management	58	15.1
General Academic Strand	36	9.40
Humanities and Social Sciences	103	26.8
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics	187	48.7
Age		
15	2	0.50
16	242	63.0
17	111	28.9
18	23	6.00
19	6	1.60
Grade Level		
Grade 11	302	78.6
Grade 12	82	21.4

The table displays the active engagement of senior high school students, primarily those in the middle adolescence stage, ranging from 14 to 17 years of age. Notably, most respondents are 16, which may vary across ages. According to a survey, 16-year-olds spend an average of 5.8 hours daily on social media, which is less for younger and older teens (Rothwell, 2023). Although specific data on 16-year-olds is limited in the Philippines, available statistics indicate that adolescents and young adults are among the country's most active social media users (Balita, 2024). This evidence strongly suggests that parasocial processes, including relationships and interactions, are likely to occur during this stage of development. Reinforced by the advent of digital technologies, senior high school students seek a sense of belonging through online participation, which gradually forms parasocial relationships with celebrities and personas.

3.2 Levels of Parasocial Relationships among Senior High School Students

This table shows that most indicators, with mean scores between 2.54 and 3.49, describing parasocial relationships among senior high school students, show neutrality. This suggests that, generally, the respondents have a neutral level of parasocial relationships, emphasizing their fair level of emotional and cognitive attachment to celebrities and identified persona. However, strong indicators of parasocial relationships were displayed in the statement "I would like to meet [celebrity or persona] in person," with the highest mean score of 4.12 and a standard deviation

of 0.86, which reflects the respondents' desire for direct interactions. Other statements such as "If [celebrity or persona] appeared on a TV program, I would watch that program" ($m=3.61$, $SD=0.82$) and "I like to watch [celebrity or persona] on television" ($m=3.76$, $SD=0.80$) also display a connection between the respondents and specific media-related figures. Moreover, weak indicators can be cited from the statement, "I feel like I have very little understanding of [celebrity or persona] as a person," which has the lowest mean score ($m=2.54$, $SD=0.83$), representing less agreement among the respondents. Meanwhile, another statement, such as "Sometimes I feel like calling or writing [celebrity or persona]," with a mean score of 2.61 and a standard deviation of 0.96, indicates weaker parasocial relationship dimensions related to personal initiative. An overall weighted mean score of 3.22 and a standard deviation of 0.47, interpreted as neutral, illustrates that, broadly, the respondents perceived their parasocial relationships with celebrities and personalities at a fair level. In addition, it can also be noted that few responses are consistent or dispersed due to the variability in responses among senior high school students. For instance, items with standard deviation scores ranging from 0.80 to 0.88 represent students' responses that are consistent or close to the mean. Thus, higher SD scores, such as 0.92 to 1.03, show more significant variability, indicating that respondents had different opinions and experiences concerning specific items of parasocial relationships.

Table 2. *Levels of parasocial relationships among senior high school students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. [Celebrity or persona] makes me feel as if I am with a someone I know well.	3.30	0.86	Neutral
2. If [celebrity or persona] appeared on a TV program, I would watch that program.	3.61	0.82	Agree
3. I see [celebrity or persona] as a natural down -to-earth person.	3.21	0.83	Neutral
4. If I saw a newspaper or magazine story about [celebrity or persona], I would read it.	3.32	0.88	Neutral
5. I would like to meet [celebrity or persona] in person.	4.12	0.86	Agree
6. I feel that I understand the emotions [celebrity or persona] experiences.	3.49	0.92	Neutral
7. I find myself thinking about [celebrity or persona] on a regular basis.	2.92	0.99	Neutral
8. I do not have any feelings about [celebrity or persona].	2.90	0.98	Neutral
9. I like to watch [celebrity or persona] on television.	3.76	0.80	Agree
10. Whenever I am unable to get news about [celebrity or persona], I really miss it.	2.81	0.95	Neutral
11. Learning about [celebrity or persona] is important to me.	3.05	1.00	Neutral
12. I have been seeking out information in the media to learn more [celebrity or persona].	3.27	0.95	Neutral
13. I sometimes go to the Internet to obtain more information about [celebrity or persona].	3.49	0.93	Neutral
14. Sometimes I feel like calling or writing [celebrity or persona].	2.61	0.96	Neutral
15. [celebrity or persona] understands the kinds of things I want to know.	3.07	0.92	Neutral
16. I sometimes make remarks to [celebrity or persona] while watching television.	3.24	0.89	Neutral
17. I am very much aware of the details of [celebrity or persona]'s life.	2.78	0.98	Neutral
18. I feel like I have very little understanding of [celebrity or persona] as a person.	2.54	0.83	Neutral
19. I look forward to seeing [celebrity or persona] on television or in the print media.	3.46	0.80	Neutral
20. I am not really interested in [celebrity or persona].	3.39	1.03	Neutral
Overall Weighted Mean	3.22	0.47	Neutral

The table highlights the prevalence of parasocial relationships among the respondents, indicating that stronger tendencies for such relationships are linked to meeting celebrities or media persona in person or spending time on media-related content. This finding is supported by some studies, which emphasize the strong parasocial interactions and relationships among adolescents tied to television and media consumption, as well as the bonds formed through watching TV shows and related content (Liebers & Schramm, 2023; Tatem & Ingram, 2022). The concept of idolization and fandom among adolescents for media stars further reinforces this idea. According to Zabukovec and Faganel (2024), specific actions performed by media characters, such as looking directly at the camera, turning towards it, addressing the audience directly, and making eye contact, can solidify these parasocial relationships. Factors contributing to adolescents' inclination to consume television and media-related content include perceived similarity to the celebrity or media persona, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and authentic social interactions (Schramm et al., 2024). For instance, adolescents who engage in social interactions on X (formerly Twitter) with their favorite media figures through retweets or replies may strengthen their parasocial relationships. Additionally, adolescents' desire to meet celebrities and media personas in person often stems from unmet emotional needs (Erickson, 2023). This emotional gap encourages adolescents to emulate specific traits from their aspirational media figures. Meanwhile, the weak indicators of parasocial relationships, specifically underscored by a limited understanding of celebrities/personas and their intention to call or write, can be attributed to several reasons. First, the idealized and superficial engagement between adolescents and celebrities/personas is often limited by their exposure to digital media, resulting in a lesser understanding of celebrities/personas as individuals and weaker parasocial bonds. Second, through awareness of the boundaries

of the one-sided relationship, adolescents' recognition may reduce their desire to reach out to the celebrity/persona, such as calling or writing, and be unlikely to elicit any personal initiative. Haupt and Johnson (2023) suggest that adolescents may also invest little in this relationship as they prioritize real-life interactions during adolescence. While some indicators show higher and lower levels of parasocial relationships, most of the items are neutral in some way. This suggests the dual nature of parasocial relationships, which may either foster connections or withdraw from real-life interactions (Lee et al., 2024). This, however, proves adolescents' flexibility in managing and nurturing digital and in-person relationships.

3.3 Levels of General Belongingness among Senior High School Students

Table 3 shows the levels of general belongingness among senior high school students. The weighted mean score of 4.38 and standard deviation of 0.92 illustrate an impartial view of belongingness. This implies that most students are socially integrated with varying measures of uncertainty. Positive signs were noticeable with indicators such as "I feel included" ($m=4.67$, $SD=1.38$), "I feel connected with others" ($m=4.88$, $SD=1.30$), "I have a sense of belonging" ($m=5.12$, $SD=1.22$); these show that majority of the students feel accepted at a moderate level within their familial and social circles. While ratings to indicators such as "I feel like an outsider" ($m=3.62$, $SD=1.56$) and "I feel isolated from the rest of the world" ($m=3.83$, $SD=1.82$) show that some students feel partially rejected. Specifically concerning was the slight agreement with the indicator "Friends and family do not involve me in their plans" ($m=4.93$, $SD=1.66$), revealing that some students still feel excluded.

Table 3. Levels of general belongingness among senior high school students

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. When I am with other people, I feel included.	4.67	1.38	Slightly Agree
2. I have close bonds with family and friends.	5.66	1.27	Slightly Agree
3. I feel like an outsider.	3.62	1.56	Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. I feel as if people do not care about me.	3.36	1.63	Slightly Disagree
5. I feel accepted by others.	4.76	1.32	Slightly Agree
6. Because I do not belong, I feel distant during the holiday season.	3.75	1.79	Neither Agree nor Disagree
7. I feel isolated from the rest of the world.	3.83	1.82	Neither Agree nor Disagree
8. I have a sense of belonging.	5.12	1.22	Slightly Agree
9. When I am with other people, I feel like a stranger.	3.27	1.62	Slightly Disagree
10. I have a place at the table with others.	4.73	1.36	Slightly Agree
11. I feel connected with others.	4.88	1.30	Slightly Agree
12. Friends and family do not involve me in their plans.	4.93	1.66	Slightly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	4.38	0.92	Neither Agree nor Disagree

In view of this, the study revealed that the need to belong contributes a lot to the student's emotional and social well-being. If students are included, they are more likely to find value added to their interactions. Students who feel included experience greater involvement than those who feel excluded, leading to loneliness and a lack of motivation for social engagement. The schools and students' families significantly encourage communication, group interactions, and peer support. Addressing these gaps ensures that the students feel included by offering support. This result supports the study conducted by Ahmadi et al. (2020), who discussed that belonging is an innate quality where people need recurrent personal connections with other people. This claimed that a sense of belonging impacts students' performance in attendance, academic performance, and success (Boston & Warren, 2017). Moreover, school counselors can plan and implement small group counseling interventions or other programs with the support of the students' families and teachers to address students' feelings of exclusion (Brooks, 2021).

3.4 Relationship between Parasocial Relationships and General Belongingness

Table 4 revealed the relationship between Parasocial Relationship and General Belongingness among senior high school students. It shows that the probability obtained ($p. 0.008$) is less than the probability criterion of <0.05 . Therefore, the researchers rejected the null hypothesis and inferred a significant association between parasocial relationships and general belongingness among senior high school students. Furthermore, the relationship is positive and weak ($R=0.14$), indicating that general belongingness increases as the parasocial relationship rises. Conversely, when parasocial relationships decrease, general belongingness decreases, too.

Table 4. *Relationship between parasocial relationships and general belongingness*

Variables	R-value	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Parasocial Relationship	0.14	0.008	Reject Ho	Significant
General Belongingness				

This finding supports the study of Gleason et al. (2017), where parasocial relationships (PSRs) with media figures play a significant role in adolescent development, potentially influencing identity formation and autonomy. Additionally, parasocial relationships with media figures influence well-being and belonging. Brought by the pandemic, parasocial closeness increased as people engaged in social distancing, suggesting that media persona became more meaningful (Bond, 2021). Furthermore, Hoffner and Bond (2022) found that parasocial relationships are associated with multiple well-being outcomes, including enhanced feelings of belonging, healthy attitudes, and coping. On the other hand, parasocial relationships involve media consumption and individual perceptions. Parasocial relationships may not directly translate into feelings of belonging unless these relationships are deeply personal or involve meaningful figures. Rosaen and Dibble (2017) indicated that perceived similarities between viewers and media persona influence the strength and enjoyment of parasocial relationships. Still, these associations can be moderated by personal characteristics such as attachment anxiety, avoidance, or loneliness. Moreover, parasocial relationships are driven by self-serving or egocentric motivations, which involve parasocial perception, suggesting a weak correlation with feelings of belongingness (Riles & Adams, 2021). This finding is limited only to the association of parasocial relationships and general belongingness. Other dynamic social factors like peer interactions, socioeconomic status, family support, and mental health may influence general belongingness, which overshadows the role of parasocial relationships. Uslu and Gizir (2017) revealed that positive relationships with teachers and peers promote adolescents' sense of school belonging and willingness to participate in school activities. Moreover, family involvement and attitudes towards school positively impact a student's sense of school belongingness.

3.5 Regression Estimate of Parasocial Relationships and General Belongingness

The results in Table 5 display the prediction of parasocial relationships to general belongingness among senior high school students. The beta coefficient obtained for the Parasocial relationship is 0.26. The standard error obtained is 0.09, while the t-value is 2.67. Moreover, the ANOVA for this regression model gauges an F-value of 7.12 with a probability value of 0.008. These results revealed that parasocial relationships can explain the significant variance in general belongingness among senior high school students. It is highlighted that the coefficient of determination obtained is 0.02, meaning that only 2% of parasocial relationships can predict general belongingness among secondary students.

Table 5. *Regression estimate of parasocial relationships and general belongingness*

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Intercept	3.53	0.32	11.01	<0.001	Significant
Parasocial Relationships	0.26	0.09	2.67	0.008	Significant

Note. $R^2 = 0.02$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.015$, F-test = 7.12

This supports the research of Lutz et al. (2024), which explores the complex relationships between parasocial interactions, social media use, and feelings of belongingness among students. It was revealed that parasocial relationships with media characters could be as effective as real-life relationships in restoring belongingness needs and regulating emotions after social exclusion among university students. Hence, these one-sided connections serve as an effective coping mechanism for a lack of belongingness. Additionally, only a small portion of parasocial relationships influences general belongingness since real-world relationships are more vital among students. Aries et al. (2022) suggested that connections with peers, teachers, and the institution influence students' sense of belonging, even among students attending distance learning. Research on predictors of belongingness among students has identified several key factors that provided more substantial predictive insights than parasocial relationships. Ahmadi et al. (2020) reported that belongingness is associated with socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and peer support. School-level variables like fairness and teacher-student relations also play a role. Moreover, peer relationships consistently influence belongingness. Factors such as school members, adequate facilities, extracurricular participation, and alignment between students' interests and school majors contribute to school belonging among senior high school students (Adinata & Hanami, 2024).

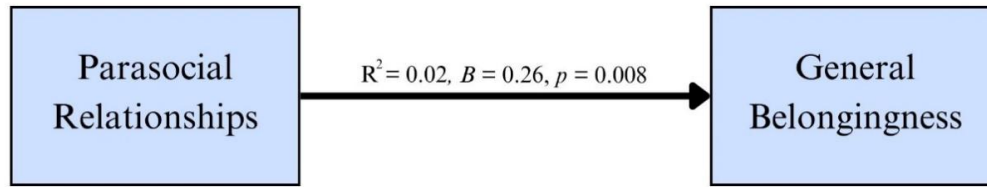


Figure 1. Simple linear regression

Figure 1 presents the simple linear regression between parasocial relationships (x) and general belongingness (y) among senior high school students. The analysis revealed that parasocial relationships correlate significantly ($p < 0.008$) with general belongingness. Moreover, parasocial relationships have a weak predictive value, accounting for only 2% of the variance in general belongingness. The beta estimate computed is 0.26, indicating that general belongingness is expected to increase by 0.26 units for each one-unit increase in parasocial relationships. This suggests that while parasocial relationships are related to feelings of belongingness, their contribution is minimal. The small predictive value indicates that other factors, such as perceived similarities (Rosaen & Dibble, 2017), egocentric motivations (Riles & Adams, 2021), and peer interactions and family support (Uslu & Gizir, 2017) are likely to influence senior high school students' sense of belonging more than parasocial relationships.

4.0 Conclusion

The researchers concluded that there is a positive and weak association between parasocial relationships and general belongingness among senior high school students. Moreover, parasocial relationships predict general belongingness among adolescents but only in a small portion. These findings implied that parasocial relationships—the connections adolescents create with media personalities—can contribute to their sense of being included with their friends, family, and others. Furthermore, media interactions can help senior high school students feel more connected to the world. This supported the research of Bond (2021), which stated that PSRs grew stronger as face-to-face interactions decreased and mediated social engagement increased. This growth was particularly evident for media personas, which are more likely to invoke parasocial interaction. This suggests that PSR may serve a compensatory function during social distancing, which started during the pandemic. The increased reliance on screens for social interaction may have blurred the distinction between real-life friends and media persona, strengthening PSRs. Furthermore, parasocial relationships through narrative media consumption and retrospective imaginative involvement can satisfy intrinsic needs, especially during social isolation (Sherrick et al., 2022). Notably, parasocial relationships are not the sole factor in fostering a sense of belongingness among senior high school students; they can be leveraged positively to support students' social and emotional well-being. The study by Vang and Nishina (2022) highlighted that a positive school interethnic climate is associated with stronger feelings of belongingness, indirectly contributing to better psychological adjustment, fewer physical symptoms, and improved student grades. Additionally, belongingness is positively related to academic resilience, buoyancy, social functioning, and psychological well-being while negatively associated with psychological and emotional distress, especially for academically at-risk adolescents (Arslan & Coşkun, 2023).

The study also revealed that senior high school students exhibit fair levels of parasocial relationships and general belongingness. While most indicators are neutral, media engagement and drive to meet celebrities and personas in person magnifies the strength of parasocial relationships among adolescents. This neutrality is bounded by the diversity of students' experiences concerning parasocial experiences. The findings provide an avenue for schools to enhance media literacy programs, underscoring the role of media in the social and emotional dimensions of adolescents (Taibi et al., 2023). In this critical period, such initiatives are imperative in building and balancing digital connections and real-life encounters, fostering healthy online engagements, and preventing excessive attachment to illusionary connections.

The researchers encourage students to assess their media consumption by setting limits and establishing acceptable boundaries to prevent excessive reliance on parasocial relationships to meet their emotional and social

needs. The study conducted by Faulhaber et al. (2023) found that reducing social media usage led to improved psychological well-being and decreases in depression, fear of missing out, anxiety, and loneliness. It has become clear that adolescents often experience "digital stress" due to their constant exposure to the online environment. This stress is primarily caused by the pressure for online social approval, overwhelming notifications, and connection overload (APA, 2023). To combat these issues, students are urged to collaborate in person and participate in school clubs, sports, or peer organizations to strengthen their sense of belonging. Given the emerging benefits and adverse effects of social media on adolescents' feelings of connection, it is essential to promote healthy parasocial experiences alongside real-life relationships (Bennett, 2024). Doing so enhances the bridge between reality and the media landscape among adolescents. Moreover, the school management team is recommended to cultivate positive relationships among students, peers, teachers, and school staff. The research of Allen (2019) suggested that parents have a significant role in building belongingness within the school community. To foster belonging among students, school administrators should ensure that the parents of the students are involved in the process. Sparks (2019) found that students who felt connected to their school and family as adolescents grew up safer and with better mental health.

Furthermore, the researchers recommended that school counselors plan and conduct various engagement programs related to media literacy, which helps students and other stakeholders understand the role of media in adolescents' social and emotional well-being. The research by Hu et al. (2018) highlighted that school counselors who facilitate programs related to media literacy help adolescents meet their emotional needs, find meaning through life challenges, and enhance self-efficacy. These programs are significant in understanding that parasocial relationships are more profound and complex, impacting individuals' lives. Furthermore, future researchers should consider getting diverse samples across the lifespan (children, young adults, middle adults, and old age) and educational levels (elementary, secondary, and tertiary) to thoroughly understand parasocial relationships and general belongingness. In addition, other statistical analyses, such as moderation, mediation, or sequential equation modeling, are recommended to deeply explore the association between parasocial relationships and general belongingness. While PSRs can be beneficial, future researchers should test other factors promoting students' belongingness, including faculty support, institutional climate, extracurricular activities, and community involvement.

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All the authors declare equal contributions to each section. The authors reviewed and approved the final work.

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One of the authors is a Guidance Designate at the chosen senior high institution. Other than that, the authors declare no conflicts of interest in the publication of this paper.

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