

I felt like it happened to me: Television audience perceptions of televised conflict

Renée A. Botta, Jill Rudd
University of Denver, Cleveland State University
{rbotta@du.edu, j.rudd@csuohio.edu}

Abstract

An increasing number of studies have linked presence to other media effects, typically as a mediating variable. Scholars have also examined individual differences in the experience of presence. For this study, the authors tested whether real world experiences would impact presence sensations when similar scenarios were acted on in television programming. A random sample telephone survey was utilized to ask 439 respondents questions about their personal experiences of conflict in their home life, the severity of the conflict, the genre they watch most often on television, and the extent to which they experience a sense of immersion and perceptual realism when viewing conflict on television.

The results indicate that men and women who reported experiencing family conflict that escalated to a threat of physical violence or to actual physical violence also reported feeling more immersed when viewing conflict on television and that women with these real world experiences also reported a greater sense of realism when viewing conflict on television. A finding that approached significance may indicate that conflict on nonfiction genres such as reality programming, news, and sports feels particularly real to those who have experienced family violence.

The implications are that such highly emotional experiences can be “re-lived” through television and lead such viewers to experience heightened states of presence. Given the studies in which presence is a mediator of other media effects, these results may also suggest that viewers who have experienced family violence get a double dose effect of television aggression through such re-lived experiences.