

## New Research Looks at Link Between Reality TV, Behavior

**D**uring the Young Investigator's New Research Poster Session on Sunday, lead author Audrey Eve Longson, DO, presented the results of her recent study, which looked at the possible effects of reality television on mental health.

With her study, Dr. Longson tried to determine if there was a link between reality television and narcissism. The study, "Is Keeping Up With the Kardashians Keeping You Down? Reality Television and its Effects on Mental Health," did not show a statistically significant relationship with overall narcissistic personality inventory (NPI) scores after adjusting for other factors.

Dr. Longson first began to wonder about the effects reality television may have in forming personality when she noticed her teen sister and her friends watching a lot of that type of programming.

"I felt concerned. Could this be bad for them?" she said. "I wondered what that would mean for her generation. I can't say what will happen to individual viewers because it will vary so much from person to person. Everything that happens with personality and mental illness, in my professional opinion, is multi-factorial."

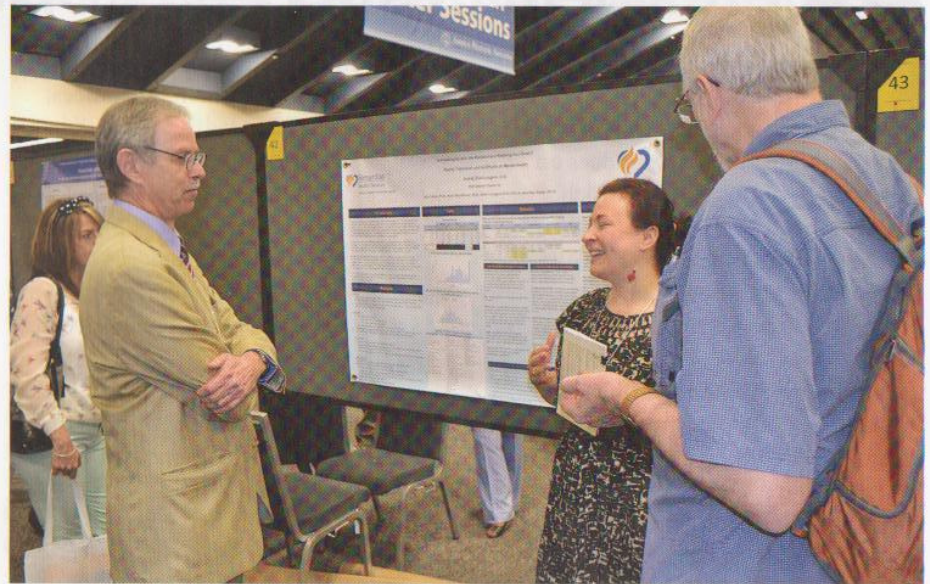
Dr. Longson turned to social media to survey subjects about their reality television viewing habits and also had

them complete NPIs and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) surveys. She said the intent of the study was to understand the ways social and environmental factors may influence behavior.

"I think American culture is moving increasingly toward the 'me, me, me,' but simultaneously we're seeing a lot yearning for community," Dr. Longson said. "While we're becoming increasingly isolated and self-focused, people are yearning for that sense of community. I know that it's been shown that in countries that are less focused on the individual, objective happiness measures are higher. I think that increasing narcissism and increasing focus on the self can lead to some positive things like good leadership skills; they can also lead to some negative things. It can interfere with interpersonal relationships and create feelings of isolation and loneliness."

While her study didn't pinpoint a link between television and increasing narcissistic behavior, it did show increased narcissistic traits with some reality television viewing.

She found that watching purely voyeuristic programming was associated with greater feelings of power as measured by RSE scores. Viewing purely voyeuristic shows was also associated with higher



*Audrey Longson, DO, discusses her research with attendees during Sunday's New Research Poster Session.*

"special person" scores.

In addition, participants that reported viewing skill-based or competition reality shows demonstrated modestly higher exhibitionism scores.

She concluded that while no single factor appears sufficient to predict the development of narcissistic traits, trends emerged that suggest a relationship between narcissistic traits and the types of reality TV watched.

Dr. Longson said she would encourage

viewers of reality television to remember the big picture.

"Remember these shows are scripted," she said. "These people are paid a lot of money. There are a lot of corporate endorsements tied to these shows. Moving forward, we need to change our definition of reality."

Dr. Longson also pointed out that her study was small and further study may shed more light on possible links between television viewing habits and behavior. ●