Speaker 1:

The Missouri State journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson:

Television shows and genres tend to be cyclical and follow emerging trends. But for most of the shows produced in the 20th century and a little bit beyond, the formula was somewhat limiting due to the structure of network and cable television. I'm Nikki Donaldson.

Nicki Donnelson:

Today on the Missouri State Journal, I have Dr. Holly Holiday. She's an associate professor of media, journalism and film at Missouri State University. She starts by sharing about her recently published article. I'm never going to stop watching it. The paradox of parasocial breakups in a post object er.

Holly Holladay:

As I was watching the finale of The Office when I was falling it along on Twitter, and I was watching these people who had spent nine years with this show say really compelling things about their sadness, really, that the series was ending. And so to me, this was, as a lot of my research projects are, a super organic way to think about what is going on here. When we talked to a lot of the people who participated in our study, they worked in offices and they worked with a Phyllis or a Stanley or insert anybody that was in Dunder Mifflin. And so we talked to them in the month after the series finale about how they were going to manage now that the series was over and that they didn't have new episodes of the office anymore

Nicki Donnelson:

In the study, Holiday says that it came down to the fact that with all of today's technology and media, whether it be DVD box sets, online fan sites, or streaming services, you don't actually have to ever stop watching your favorite shows.

Holly Holladay:

Part of what the article did is engage with this idea of post object fandom, which is a concept that was developed by a scholar named Rebecca Williams. And what she says is that we're living in this world where it never has to be over because we are granted all sorts of access to our fan objects because of streaming services, because of social media, because of all of these ways that we can continue to engage. We can rewatch. If anybody has rewatched a series, you're always finding something new, even on the 10, three watch. And it gives you comfort. It really, really does.

Holly Holladay:

Especially, and I think back to what people were doing during COVID or how people, and we talked to some folks about this in the article, what people do in hard times is they look for something that comforts them. And what we found in our study and what I can just speak to anecdotally and personally is that a lot of times that's a series that has been on the air for five, eight, 10 years, that you've really gotten to know these characters. They feel like, as some of our participants said, like friends and family who are really important to you, and we have a tendency to pathologize that, but it's such a normal thing.

Nicki Donnelson:

Later seasons of television series may lose steam and therefore decrease in viewership. Holiday says many hang on to the bitter end for a couple of reasons.

Holly Holladay:

Why would you continue to watch something? Why would you watch something in the first place that you didn't enjoy? There's a couple of answers to that. First of all, it was something that maybe you did used to enjoy. And so I think specifically I started watching This Is Us when it came out. As time went on, they would do these individual character episodes. And I, at that point, probably only cared about one character and they would hold me hostage and it would make me angry. And then I would text my best friend and say, "These people are trash. I hate them. And I never want to see them again."

Holly Holladay:

And yet, I kept watching it because number one, I wanted to know how it ended. I wanted to know what was going to happen. But number two was fun to engage socially and to talk to people about how terrible it was. There was some pleasure in that. That really leads to the second reason I think people hate watch things, to be a part of a discourse, to be a part of a conversation.

Nicki Donnelson:

Holiday's book, Television Milestones, Parks and Recreation will be out in 2023. She teases the premise.

Holly Holladay:

I took on Parks and Recreation in part because it was a series that I know so well that I really, really loved. It felt like getting to write a very long love letter to a series that was so important to me in my twenties. I approach it from a few different ways to make the case that it is a transitional text and it in particular illustrates the transitional period that we were in American culture in that period and the television and new media we're in in that period as well.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Dr. Holly Holiday. I'm Nikki Donaldson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1:

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397.