

# Narcissism and celebrity <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

We used the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) to assess the degree of narcissism among celebrities. Results indicate that celebrities are significantly more narcissistic than MBA students and the general population. Contrary to findings in the population at large, in which men are more narcissistic than women, female celebrities were found to be significantly more narcissistic than their male counterparts. Reality television personalities had the highest overall scores on the NPI, followed by comedians, actors, and musicians. Further, our analyses fail to show any relationship between NPI scores and *years of experience* in the entertainment industry, suggesting that celebrities may have narcissistic tendencies prior to entering the industry.

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## 1. Introduction

Society's preoccupation with fame has existed since ancient times (Braudy, 1997); however, the current fascination with celebrity has reached a fever pitch. Our unrelenting quest for knowledge about the lives, loves and failures of the famous has been

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fueled by the explosive growth of the entertainment industry,<sup>1</sup> as well as by a zealous media. Attesting to our preoccupation is the public's devotion to television programs such as *Entertainment Tonight*, *The Insider*, *Inside Edition*, *Access Hollywood*, and *Extra*, which attract more than 100 million American viewers each week (Tapper & Morris, 2005).

Paradoxically, although celebrities are more exposed today than just about any other group in society, our knowledge of their behavior derives primarily from anecdotal evidence such as interviews and popular press articles (cf. Berlin, 1996). Further clouding our understanding is that information about celebrities is often carefully controlled by "cultural intermediaries" such as publicists, agents, managers (Rojek, 2001), and the celebrities themselves (Hagan & Marr, 2006).

Of significance, a search of the academic literature on celebrity across all social science disciplines reveals virtually no studies that have gathered systematic data from large or even moderately sized samples of celebrities.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we opine that celebrities are simultaneously the most widely exposed, yet one of the most understudied and least understood groups in our society.

In this research, we take an initial step to studying celebrity behavior by examining questions related to narcissism. Specifically, we use the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) to: (1) examine whether celebrities are more narcissistic than other populations, (2) determine if the components of narcissism differ across various types of celebrities, and (3) assess whether individuals possess narcissistic characteristics before entering the industry.

## 2. Celebrities and narcissism

Celebrities are individuals who have achieved a level of fame that makes them well known in society. The proliferation of celebrity culture has spawned an intensive level of curiosity and speculation about the celebrity personality. In particular, when celebrities engage in sensational behavior, narcissism is often hypothesized as an explanation (Grigoriadis, 2005).

The term "narcissism" derives from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a youth who fell in love with his own reflection. Being narcissistic has both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, narcissists appear to be less depressed (Watson & Biderman, 1993), are extraverted (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), have strong initial likeability (Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004), and perform better in public than non-narcissists (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). Their extraverted behavior and desire to be liked can make them enjoyable to work with initially. On the negative side, narcissists crave attention, are overconfident, and often lack empathy. These negative consequences make some narcissists difficult to work with at an interpersonal level, and often the initial positive impression they create can change to a negative one. If we find that celebrities have narcissistic tendencies, may knowledge may allow others, such as producers, directors, and others, to work with them more effectively and allow the public greater insight into their behavior.

<sup>1</sup> The entertainment industry is comprised largely of motion pictures, music, television, and games. Entertainment is the leading export of the United States and its expansion seems limitless (S&P Industry Study, 2004). The industry generated close to half a trillion dollars in revenues last year.

<sup>2</sup> The lack of studies with celebrity data is most likely due to limited researcher access. Most celebrities are "protected" by publicists and agents who screen everything that is sent to them.

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